

Wiplala

Wiplala

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WIPLALA



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- 1 *Fly Catches Something* 8
- 2 *The Stone Poet* 18
- 3 *Dinner in Town* 29
- 4 *Pixilate, Pixilate* 36
- 5 *The House is Too Big* 46
- 6 *Atlas* 55
- 7 *In the Paluce* 65
- 8 *Honey Cake for Breakfast* 73
- 9 *The Basket of Fruit* 81
- 10 *Lotty* 88
- 11 *The Doctor* 95
- 12 *The Thief* 103
- 13 *The Watch* 111
- 14 *Doctor Vink Arrives* 118
- 15 *Ghosts* 125
- 16 *Berries* 134
- 17 *Commemoration* 141
- 18 *Home Again* 150



This is Mr. Blom.



This is Johannes



This is Nelly Delly.



And this is the house in Amsterdam where they live.

So that's that. Oh yes, I almost forgot: they have a cat called Fly.

Here he is.

They have not got a fly called Pussy, but then why should they?

That is all for the moment.

For the moment.

And now the story begins.



1 *Fly Catches Something*

Mr. Blom sat hammering at his typewriter. It was a very old, bulky sort of typewriter and it made an awful din. Mr. Blom was a very learned man and he was writing a book on Political Tensions in the Middle Ages. A very learned book of course.

It was spring but it was raining hard and they were sitting indoors. John and Nelly Delly were cutting out car models from the paper—lovely new models—with a big pair of scissors each. The tea kettle sang on the stove and gusts of rain splashed against the windows. Fly sat licking himself, and for the rest everything was quiet.

“I wish something would happen,” said Nelly Delly. “I wish we had a flying carpet, or that somebody would come from the moon in a flying saucer.”

"Be quiet," said Mr. Blom. "I can't work."

"I wish we had a chocolate ice," whispered Johannes.
"And that we had a real car."

"Life is awfully boring," said Nelly Delly. "Nothing ever happens."

"Give me another cup of tea," said Mr. Blom.

"But you haven't had any yet, Daddy," said Nelly Delly.
"I have still got to make the tea."

"Oh well, make it then," said Mr. Blom.

Nelly Delly went to make it in the nice blue teapot. She opened the cupboard to fetch the tin of tea. Fly, the cat, stuck his nose into the cupboard and sniffed the lower shelf.

"What is the matter, Fly? Do you smell mice? Fly!"

"Miaow," said Fly. She was a cat who always gave an answer, a very clever wise cat she was.

"You come out of there," said Nelly Delly. "What are you looking for on the lower shelf—what—you haven't got a mouse—Fly?"

Nelly Delly saw a little *something* running away through the room. Fly shot after it, along the skirting board, and disappeared in the darkest corner of the room behind the couch.

"What has she got—a mouse?" asked Johannes.

"Yes, a mouse or something. Fly, what is the matter?"

"What is all this noise?" said Mr. Blom. "Why are you making such a row? I can't get on with my work."

"Fly has got a mouse or something," said Nelly Delly, and she tried to see what it was behind the couch. She heard an odd little noise, heard Fly spitting. There was a short struggle, then suddenly it was dead quiet. Fly sat in the



corner. She sat there as still as a small pussy statue.

Nelly Delly grabbed behind the couch and that was very plucky of her.

"I have got it," she said. She felt something struggling in her hand. Johannes came running to see what she had caught. But the struggling thing made such funny noises—she took it to the table into the light and there she opened her hand.

On Nelly Delly's hand stood a tiny little man. An odd little man, a very odd little man, with bristly hair, angry little eyes, black trousers, a lumber jacket, and woollen shawl round his little neck. He looked at Nelly Delly, angry but also frightened. Scared stiff he seemed and he showed his little teeth.

Nelly Delly and Johannes stood speechless, looking at this miracle, but Mr. Blom had not noticed a thing. He went on typing his Political Tensions in the Middle Ages.

"Daddy," cried Johannes. "Come and see."

"Be quiet," said Mr. Blom. "I can't work."

"But you *must* look, Daddy," said Nelly Delly. She tightened her grip on the little man so that he could not escape.

Mr. Blom looked up. "What is it?" he asked a little grumpily, as if he were annoyed that they had disturbed him for such a trifle. "Is that a gnome? Gnomes don't exist, so that is quite impossible. And now let me get on with my work."

"But Daddy, there he *is*," said Johannes. "Just look at him. What is your name?" he continued, turning to the little creature. "Who are you? What are you?"

The little fellow did not reply.

"We won't do you any harm," said Nelly Delly. "Are you a gnome?"

"I am *not* a gnome," said the little man indignantly. "I am a wiplala."

"Oh," said Nelly Delly. "What is a wiplala?"

"What I am," said the little fellow. "That is a wiplala."

"So you are a wiplala," said Johannes. "And what is your name?"

"My name is Wiplala," said the little creature. "Didn't I tell you?"

"I see. So you *are* a wiplala, and your name is also Wiplala?"

"Yes."

"And where do you come from?" asked Nelly Delly. "No, don't be frightened. I will put you down here on the table. Be careful, mind the teapot."

"And where is my tea?" said Mr. Blom, looking across the table. "Dash it all, is that gnome still there?"

"He is not a gnome," said Johannes. "He is a wiplala and his name is also Wiplala."

Now Mr. Blom began to feel a little uneasy. He got up and bent over Wiplala. "What do you want here, and where do you come from?" he asked rather severely.

Wiplala sat down on the table. He put his little hands over his small face and began to cry. "The other wiplalas have sent me away," he sobbed.

"Oh dear," said Nelly Delly, "How dreadful for you. Sent away by your own friends?"

"Yes," wailed Wiplala.

"What did you do?"

"I walked down the track of a mole, very very far, and then I suddenly landed on the lower shelf of your cupboard. And then I saw a pot of peanut butter, and then I t-t-took some. . . ."

"That comes from putting peanut butter on the lower shelf," said Mr. Blom. "Mice and gnomes will go for it."

"I am not a gnome," said Wiplala, "I am a wiplala."

"All right then," said Mr. Blom soothingly. "And what do you intend to do now, Mr. Wiplala?"

The little man lifted his tear-stained face towards all those big people, and Johannes said: "Just look at Fly!

There she is, standing quite still for half an hour in the same place in the corner. Fly, what are you doing? Come along, Fly!"

But Fly did not answer this time. Fly was silent and stood there stock still. And Wiplala looked guilty.

"Fly," called Nelly Delly in a sudden panic, and she ran towards the cat. She touched him but immediately withdrew her hand quite perplexed.

"She is . . . she has . . . become a cat of stone," she cried out.

In a moment Johannes had joined her and picked up the stony cat. "Yes, made of stone. A nice black and white stone pussy."

Mr. Blom took the little Wiplala between his fingers and looked at him sternly. "What have you done to that cat?" he asked.

"I have pixilated him," said Wiplala.

"Pixilated? You have bewitched him," said Nelly Delly. "You have turned him into stone!"

"We don't call that bewitching, only pixilating," said the little man. "And if I hadn't pixilated him he would have eaten me. He was already playing with me. He was lashing out at me with his horrible claws. I had to pixilate him!"

"Then will you be so good as to pixilate him back immediately," said Mr. Blom. "Otherwise . . ." and he pinched the little creature between his fingers.

"Look out, Daddy. Look out!" said the children. But it was too late. Wiplala moved his little hands very quickly to and fro and in an odd way, and Mr. Blom turned to stone.

Quite literally into a stone. He had become a stony father with a stony moustache and stony clothes.

"Oh dear, what have you done, Wiplala?" cried Johannes and Nelly Delly. "What have you done to our father?"

"Pixilated him," said Wiplala proudly.

"Oh dear, dear Wiplala, please pixilate him back. He is the only father we have got and he is so nice. And so clever. And he works so hard and he puts us to bed every night and tells us stories and he takes us to the zoo. Wiplala, quick, pixilate him back, do you hear!"

"But he wanted to hurt me," said Wiplala, trembling.

"No, no, we promise he won't do anything. Really, we swear he won't. Oh please!"

Wiplala again moved his hands rapidly, in the same odd way, and Mr. Blom began to move. His eyes were no longer eyes of stone, his arms were no longer arms of stone. He laughed again and called out: "Where is that tea of mine?"

"I shall make the tea, Daddy," said Nelly Delly, beaming with happiness.

"I believe I have slept," said Mr. Blom. "Did you do that, you miserable little gnome?"

"You must be nice to him, Daddy," said Johannes.

"He is a little magician," cried Nelly Delly, pouring boiling water on the tea. "He can do everything. He can change human beings and animals into stone. Would you like a cup of tea, Wiplala?"

Wiplala was still sitting on the table. He put one small finger to his forehead and said: "How odd, how very odd . . . I could do it!"

“What could you do, Wiplala?”

“I could pixilate the cat, and I could pixilate that man, and I could also pixilate him back again.”

“Yes,” said Johannes. “That was very clever!”

“But you see, I was sent away by the other wiplalas because I could not pixilate!” said Wiplala. “I was a bungler, they said. I never managed it somehow. I had to pass a Test and everything went wrong. I could not pixilate. And now I suddenly can.”

“I know you can,” said Nelly Delly. “Only now you have to pixilate back our cat, you know. Don’t forget that!”

“I daren’t,” said Wiplala. “He will eat me.”

“No,” said Mr. Blom. “I shall see to it that he doesn’t eat you. When Fly sees that you are a friend of ours, then he won’t eat you.”

“Then I am a friend of yours?” asked Wiplala, pleasantly surprised.

“Of course you are a friend of ours. We like having you here.”

“Yes,” said Johannes. “And you may live here and sleep here and go out with us. And eat with us. But you must pixilate Fly back.”

“All right then,” said Wiplala. “But you are responsible.” He put his hands up and moved them quickly to and fro, just in front of the cat’s stony eyes.

But nothing happened. Fly was a stone and remained a stone. Wiplala became nervous and tried again. The cat remained a stone. Now Wiplala worked very hard, fluttering his little hands. His eyes popped out of his head with the

exertion and tiny drops of sweat appeared on his little forehead. It was no good. The cat remained a stone.

"Oh dear," wailed Nelly Delly. "It won't work."

"No," said Wiplala in despair. "It won't. You see now that I can't pixilate. I can *sometimes*, by accident. And then suddenly I can't any longer. They are quite right, the other wiplalas. I am a bungler."

"I must say," said Mr. Blom. "That we are in a fine pickle. A cat of stone and a wiplala who can't pixilate. Who *sometimes* can and *sometimes* can't." Mr. Blom began to lose his temper again.

"Don't get angry!" cried Nelly Delly and Johannes together. "He can't help it, isn't that so, Wiplala, you can't help it? Perhaps you are a bit tired, perhaps you need to sleep a little first? And tomorrow you will be able to pixilate pussy back again, isn't that so?"

"I think so," said Wiplala doubtfully. "I hope so, I will try."

"Come on then, let's have tea," said Nelly Delly, and together with Johannes she set to work. They laid the table and prepared the food. Wiplala was given a doll's chair, put on the top of the table. And a doll's table and a doll's plate and a doll's mug of plastic. They gave him some bread and butter, cut in very small pieces—with peanut butter. He became jollier and jollier. He began to sing for joy. He sang:

*"Wiplala, Wiplala, out in the wood,
It's boiling in winter, in summer there's ice.
Sugar and coffee and mustard and spice,
Wiplala, Wiplala, out in the wood."*

"That's an odd little song," said Mr. Blom. "And it's also wrong. In winter it is *not* boiling hot, and in summer it's *not* cold. It should be the other way round." .

"With us," said Wiplala, "the winter is hot and the summer cold."

"I see," said Mr. Blom. "Then you live in the Southern hemisphere, I assume."

"I don't live in any hemisphere," said Wiplala. "As a matter of fact, I don't live anywhere at all now." With that he began to cry again, and very small tears fell into his very small plastic mug.

"Don't cry, Wiplala," said Nelly Delly. "Come on, I shall put you to bed. We have a wonderful little bed for you. You may sleep in my doll's cot. And I shall undress you."

"I can do that myself," said Wiplala.

They all went to sleep. In the middle of the night Nelly Delly was woken up by a small hand on her face.

"What is the matter? Who is that?"

"It's me," said the voice of Wiplala. "I have pixilated the cat back. I could not sleep, and I thought: wait, I must try again. And it worked!"

"Oh that's wonderful," said Nelly Delly with a sigh of relief.

"But now he is sitting by your bed," said Wiplala, "and I am afraid of him."

"You come up here, little Wiplala," said Nelly Delly. She stuck him in the sleeve of her nightgown, and there Wiplala snuggled down and went to sleep.

2 *The Stone Poet*

“And now this must stop,” roared Mr. Blom. “I won’t have any more of this. Look at it! Ice, ice with whipped cream. Instead of the excellent stew that was on the table!”

Nelly Delly and Johannes looked crestfallen.

“That we should have a wiplala in the house is one thing,” barked Mr. Blom. “But I have had enough of this pixilation.”

And there they sat. Nelly Delly had cooked a stew with onions and meat. But when they were sitting at the table Johannes said suddenly: “I don’t like stew, I would much rather have ice cream.” And that naughty Wiplala had changed a large bowl of hot stew into a bowl of vanilla ice cream. Now there was nothing to eat except ice cream. The children simply adored it, but their father had worked hard

all day at his book. He was hungry. He wanted decent, nourishing food. And not only ice cream. "Change it back into hot stew," said Mr. Blom, "and quick!"

Wiplala sat, as he always did at mealtimes, on top of the table in his doll's chair. He moved his little hands nervously over the big bowl of ice cream. The ice became greenish. The ice became hot, it steamed. They all looked and sniffed. It had turned into curly kale mixed with mashed potatoes. "Is that stew?" cried Mr. Blom.

"No, curly kale," said Wiplala. "It turned itself into curly kale. I can't pixilate so *very* well yet. It sometimes turns out differently from what I want."

"Hm," said Mr. Blom. "All right then, we shall eat curly kale. Better than ice cream. But as I said before, from now on no more pixilation. You may go on living here, Wiplala, we shall look after you, but no more magic tricks, please. I want to know where I am. If everybody started pixilating fast and loose, nobody would know what is what. Is that understood?"

Wiplala looked very guilty. He took a little curly kale and they all ate in silence. Gone was the lovely ice cream. Now the door opened and there stood Arthur Hollidee from next door. He was a poet. He had written one hundred and forty-seven books of poems, but nobody ever wanted to read them and nobody wanted to buy the books. And so he was poor, and he was hungry.

"Sit down Mr. Hollidee," said Nelly Delly. "Then I shall get you a plate."

Arthur Hollidee sat down. "Good heavens!" he said.

"What is that?" He looked at Wiplala and shrank back.
"That is . . . what is . . . ?"

"That is Wiplala," said Johannes. "Wiplala, this is Mr. Arthur Hollidee."

Nelly Delly handed the poet a plate. But he sat there stupefied with the plate in his lap and looked at Wiplala.

"A . . . a . . . real gnome," he stammered.

"I'm not a gnome," said Wiplala. "I am a . . ."

The poet did not listen. He began to beam with happiness and he said: "You are a gnome! All my life I have wanted to see a real gnome. And I wanted to have one! I shall take you home with me. I shall put you in my writing desk. You are *my* gnome." And he stretched out his hand.

"No! No!" cried Wiplala. "No! No! I don't want to."

"I am going to take you to . . ." began the poet, but suddenly his hand grew rigid. And his smile. And his eyes. He sat there on his chair, the plate in one hand, the other hand stretched out. He had been turned to stone. He was a stone poet.

"Oh Wiplala!" said Johannes.

"My dear Wiplala," said Nelly Delly. "Again?"

"What is that," cried Mr. Blom. "Have you . . . well I never, and just after we had settled that you were done with all this pixilation. How dare you!"

"He wanted to take me away. He is a bad man. I have pixilated him."

"He is not a bad man," said Nelly Delly. "He is a very kind nice man, a poet; you must pixilate him back, Wiplala."



"I bet you it won't succeed," said Mr. Blom crossly. "Of course you can't pixilate him back now, can you?"

"I shall try," said Wiplala. And he did try, he fluttered his little hands mysteriously. But nothing happened.

And there sat the stone poet facing the curly kale, smiling strangely with his stony grin.

"So there we are now," said Mr. Blom. "With a stony Arthur Hollidee on our hands. What are we to do?"

"Let's eat first," said Nelly Delly. "Perhaps Wiplala will be able to bring it off in an hour's time."

They ate their curly kale in silence. And the whole afternoon Wiplala tried to change the poet into a living poet. But however hard he tried it wouldn't work. The man remained a stone.

After supper Mr. Blom said: "We had better put him in the corner, he is in my way."

They were just trying, the three of them, to drag the poor stone poet away when the door opened and Miss Hollidee came in. She was the poet's sister and lived next door.

"Is Arthur here by any chance?" she asked. When she saw the stone image she gave a yell. "What is that? Is he . . . what has happened?" she cried anxiously.

"My dear Emilia," said Mr. Blom. "It is going to be quite all right, don't worry. Really it will be all right."

"But he is . . . a statue!" cried Emilia Hollidee.

"Yes," said Nelly Delly and Johannes. "He has been turned to stone."

"How did that happen?" she asked sharply.

"Well . . . you see, I don't quite know," said Mr. Blom.

He had quickly slipped Wiplala into his pocket, for he did not want to explain the whole story. Moreover it seemed better that Emilia should know nothing about the gnome. She would not have understood anyway.

"I think it happened because he was hungry," said Mr. Blom. "You don't give him enough to eat, Emilia, and that petrified him."

"Hungry . . . oh dear," sobbed Emilia. "I know we are hungry. We are both as thin as rakes. Do you really think that did it? Hunger? Is that possible?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Blom. "I am sure of it."

"And what must I do with him now?" said Emilia.

"You just leave him here," said Mr. Blom. "He's not standing in our way, or rather he's not sitting in our way, because he is sitting down."

"No," said Emilia firmly. "I will take him with me. I shall put him in the front room!"

"Are you sure you want to take him with you?"

"Quite sure." And she tried to lift up her stone brother. But he was too heavy. He sat glued to his chair, that was also of stone.

"Don't wriggle, Wiplala," said Mr. Blom to his pocket.

"What did you say?" said Emilia.

"Oh nothing. I said nothing. Now if you insist on taking him with you we shall help you. Come on Nelly Delly, come on Johannes. We must shift him."

They took the poet, the four of them, and dragged him to the front door. They could hardly get him through. It was an awful job, but at last they stood in the street.

And on they went. Oh dear, oh dear, how heavy he was, this stone Arthur Hollidee. They only had to go next door, but even that was too much for them. They put him in the middle of the street for a breather.

"Look at that. What is it? A statue?" said a voice. They looked up. It was the burgomaster on his evening walk.

"A statue?" asked the burgomaster. "And I knew nothing about it. Well, well, I see that is our poet. Our poet, Arthur Hollidee. And what a work of art! A wonderful likeness. Who is the sculptor?"

"Ah . . . oh, someone from outside," said Mr. Blom.

"It is Arthur himself—" began Emilia, but Nelly Delly and Johannes interrupted her and began to talk quickly.

"A beautiful statue isn't it?" they said. "Yes, we are delighted with it too."

"It ought to be put up in this little square," said the burgomaster. "Just here, don't you think? And I shall unveil it." He began to smile, for the burgomaster simply loved unveiling. He liked nothing better than to unveil statues.

"Will you fetch us a sheet?" he said to Emilia. "A large sheet."

Emilia was so startled that she immediately obeyed the order and fetched a sheet from her house.

"That's it," said the burgomaster. "Look, we are going to put the statue here. Will you give me a hand?"

Puffing and panting, Mr. Blom and the children dragged the statue to the spot he indicated.

"And now put the sheet round it. I shall immediately

order the town crier to announce that tonight the statue of our famous fellow-citizen and poet, Mr. Arthur Hollidee, will be unveiled."

It was five to seven. The entire square was packed with people, all talking excitedly. "Whose statue, did you say?" asked a man.

"Arthur Hollidee's, the poet."

"Never heard of him," said the man.

"Oh, but he is a famous poet. Very famous. Never read his poems? But you ought to. They are magnificent!"

"Arthur Hollidee," murmured the people. "At last a statue for Arthur Hollidee, the famous poet."

Among all those people stood the children and Mr. Blom. Wiplala was in Mr. Blom's pocket.

"Don't wriggle, Wiplala. Keep quiet."

There was the burgomaster; he climbed on to a small platform that had been put up in the afternoon. Everybody fell silent. "Fellow citizens," said the burgomaster solemnly "today is a great day. The statue of our great poet, Arthur Hollidee, will be unveiled. At last the hour has come. No doubt you all have a volume of his poems lying on your bed-side table. No doubt you read his poems daily."

The people in the square shuffled their feet and murmured "Yes . . . yes . . ."

"Now I pull this sheet away," said the burgomaster.

With one tug he pulled the sheet from the statue. And there sat Arthur Hollidee, holding his plate, one hand stretched out.



"Ladies and gentlemen, fellow citizens," said the burgo-master, "here you see the empty plate. A symbol of the position of poets these days. The empty plate, hunger, poverty, neglect."

Several ladies in the audience began to cry. Miss Emilia sobbed aloud.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted the people. "Magnificent! What a splendid carving!"

"All the same, the likeness is not perfect," said an old gentleman. "I knew him well because I live here at the corner. The nose is not so good. Arthur Hollidee's nose is much longer. But now where is Arthur Hollidee himself? Where is your brother, Miss?" the old gentleman asked Emilia.

"He . . . he is gone on a journey," stammered Emilia Hollidee.

Wiplala, in Mr. Blom's pocket, wriggled violently.

"What is the matter?" whispered Mr. Blom, and he bent his head to hear what Wiplala had to say.

"I believe I can pixilate him back now," said Wiplala.

"I wouldn't do it," said Mr. Blom. "He'd better remain a stone for a bit longer. I would leave him alone for the present!"

The ceremony was over. Everybody went home. Mr. Blom and the children and Wiplala as well. When they passed a book store Johannes said: "Look at that! What a crowd!"

There were at least a hundred people pushing each other to get into the book store.

"They are going to buy Arthur Hollidee's poems," muttered Mr. Blom. "Now he is suddenly *really* famous. Everybody is ashamed, because no one has ever read his books. Look, the people coming out have his poetry books in their hands!"

And so it was. For a whole week people besieged the book shops to buy Hollidee's poems. The shop windows were full of his books. People gave lectures on Arthur Hollidee and there were talks on the radio about Arthur Hollidee.

Reporters of all the newspapers called at the poet's house and asked Miss Emilia Hollidee: "Where is your brother?"

"He is abroad," she said firmly.

"But where has he gone?" asked the reporters. "We want to interview him! We want to take photos of him. He must appear on television."

"I am sorry," said Miss Hollidee. "He is not here."

Then the reporters took her photo. They filled their newspapers with portraits of Arthur Hollidee in youth, and were very pleased. A few days later Miss Emilia Hollidee called on the Blom family.

Nelly Delly quickly put Wiplala in a drawer.

"Well, well, Emilia, and how are you getting on?"

"It's terrible," sobbed Emilia Hollidee. "My poor brother has been turned into a stone statue and now the hail is coming down on him!"

"But he does not feel it, he is made of stone," said Mr. Blom to console her.

"Maybe, but I miss him terribly," said Emilia. "Is there nothing one could do? Hunger turned him to stone and now I think every day: if only he had lived to see this, it wouldn't have happened."

"Lived to see what?"

"The big sale of his books. They had to reprint all his volumes. I get so much money. I can buy as much food as I like. And what good is that to him? None at all. He is made of stone."

"But he may come to life again," said Nelly Delly, who was beginning to feel very sorry for Miss Hollidee.

"But how? And why do you think so?" asked Emilia.

"Eh . . . I just thought he might," said Nelly Delly shyly.

"Perhaps you should put something on his plate at night," said Mr. Blom. "If I were you I would pile it up every night with porridge, or peas."

"Why peas?" asked Emilia.

"Well, either peas or cabbage and a pork chop. I only

mean, perhaps that will help. I wouldn't do it in the daytime, because the food might be stolen. But do it at night."

"I will do that," said Miss Hollidee. She heaved a sigh and went away.

Wiplala was fetched from his drawer, and he said: "Shall I try to pixilate the poet back? Now?"

"Yes," said Nelly Delly.

"Oh yes," said Johannes.

"No," said Mr. Blom. "Really, children it is much better to leave him for a few more weeks. Now the people are looking at him. His photo is in the papers. He will be more famous every day. And get more money! It is annoying for his sister, but when he comes to life again, she will be all the more pleased."

"That's true," said Nelly Delly.

3 *Dinner in Town*

Every day Nelly Delly went with a shopping basket to the statue. In the basket sat Wiplala, under a cloth. They usually went towards dusk, when there were few people about in the square.

"Here we are," Nelly Delly used to whisper. "Come on, do your best."

Wiplala poked his little head out of the basket and grasped the rim of the basket with his tiny hands. Then he hoisted himself up, till he sat on the rim. Then he quickly looked in all directions to see if anyone were coming, began to mutter very softly and to move his fingers about. The idea of all this was to change the poor poet Hollidee into an ordinary man of flesh and blood. But every day he failed.

"Now you see," said Wiplala bitterly. "I can't pixilate."

"But you did turn him into stone," said Nelly Delly.
"And that was jolly clever!"

"Yes," Wiplala sighed, "but I ought to be able to do it the other way round. This man is awfully difficult to pixilate back. Don't you see any movement in him yet?"

"No," said Nelly Delly. "Nothing at all."

"That is a pity," said Wiplala. "I can't do it. I am a bungler." And he sobbed.

"Wiplala, dear," said Nelly Delly, trying to comfort him, "don't cry."

She wiped his very small tears with her handkerchief, and put him gently back in her basket, under the cloth. "Some day you will manage. It is only a fortnight ago that you turned him to stone. Come on, let's go home."

"Well?" asked Mr. Blom. "Any luck?"

"No," said Wiplala. "Again no luck. No wonder the other wiplalas don't want me any more. They think I am stupid."

Johannes, who had been playing with his cars, joined them and said: "You ought to practise a lot, Wiplala. Just pixilate all sorts of things here at home, to see if it works."

"No thank you!" cried Mr. Blom, very alarmed. "I don't like that pixilation at all, especially if it is only *half* done. You see what a sad mess we are in with Mr. Hollidee. The poor man has remained a statue and has been standing for two weeks in a square."

"But you did say that it wasn't at all bad for him. You are always saying his books are selling much better now, aren't you, Daddy?"

"Yes, that is true. But his poor sister, Emilia, is inconsolable."

"She is coming now," whispered Nelly Delly. "Wiplala, hide yourself, she shouldn't see you."

Wiplala crept under the blue teapot cosy on the table.

"Good day, Emilia," said Mr. Blom. "How are you, Miss Emilia?" said the children.

Miss Emilia Hollidee had cried her eyes scarlet. She was obviously terribly sad about her brother's fate. She sat down at the table and sighed deeply.

"Will he ever become an ordinary man again?" she asked. "I don't believe it myself any longer. He has become so *hard*. And he used to be so gentle."

"How is that? *Hard*?" asked Johannes.

"Well, of course. He is of stone, so he is hard. And every morning I go and look at him and then I put my hand on his knee or his arm, and then I feel that he is as hard as a brick and icy cold. And then I think: 'That is not my brother. That can never even become my brother.'"

They all felt terribly sorry for poor Emilia. They would have loved to say: "Dear Emilia, don't worry. Either today or tomorrow it will come off. Today or tomorrow our Wiplala will suddenly change him by magic into a human being." But they could not say it because Emilia was not allowed to see Wiplala. Just imagine if she saw him. Imagine if she knew that Wiplala had bewitched her brother. Dear me, she would be furious with the poor little fellow, she might want to harm him. No, thank goodness, she knew nothing.

"I wish I could be of stone myself," sighed Emilia.

"You of stone?" asked Mr. Blom. "But why, for goodness sake, Emilia?"

"Then I could stand next to him," she sobbed.

"But, surely, you could do that now."

"Oh yes, but not so long. Not always. Now I always have to go home again and then I have to eat my meals alone, and read the paper alone, and listen to the radio alone and drink my tea alone. And if I was made of stone then I could stand next to him quite still, always and always, a hundred years or more, in the wind and the rain, and I would be much happier than I am now. And less lonely. Oh, I wish I was made of stone."

Johannes looked at the teapot and saw that Wiplala had half crawled out from underneath. He realized that Wiplala had heard every word and that he was very upset. He realized that Wiplala was just about to pixilate Miss Emilia into stone, because she so much wanted it.

"Don't, don't," Johannes cried anxiously. "Stay where you are and don't move."

Wiplala crawled back behind the teapot and the danger was past.

"Who are you talking to?" said Miss Emilia, astonished.

"Oh . . . to the cat, Fly," said Johannes a bit nervously.

"But the cat is outside," said Miss Emilia. "I saw him in the street just now."

Mr. Blom saved the situation. He put his hand on Miss Emilia's shoulder and said: "My dear friend, I am really very sorry for your sake. But we are all convinced that it is

only a matter of time—we are sure that before long your brother will be able to walk through the town again as an ordinary man. But just now you feel very lonely, and so may we invite you to come and have dinner with us in town? That would be very nice for us all and it would make a change.”

Miss Emilia shook her head. “It is very, very kind of you,” she said. “And I would like to do it. But I think it is better for me to go home. Then I can sit in front of my window and look at my poor stone brother. And then I can give him a friendly nod now and then, when I am having my dinner. You know, I am having pork chops tonight. He was so fond of them but he never got them because we did not have the money. Now I have money enough, because his books sell so well, that I can afford pork chops. He did not live to see it.”

She took her coat and went away, leaving everybody rather sad.

“Poor thing,” said Wiplala. “Perhaps it would have been better if I had pixilated her. Then she would have been a stone and could have stood by his side.”

“Look here,” said Mr. Blom. “You are only to pixilate with my permission, isn’t that understood? When you want to start again you first ask me if you may. Do you promise me that, Wiplala?”

“Yes,” said Wiplala hesitatingly. “I will promise but I don’t know if I can *always* keep my promise, because you know, Daddy, I am not an ordinary little boy, and we wiplalas have pixilating in our blood.”

Mr. Blom turned pink with pleasure because Wiplala had called him Daddy. He thought that was so nice, so charming, and he was immediately in a good temper again.

"You know what, children?" he said. "I have got a plan. I won't work any more today, and we are going to have dinner in town. Miss Emilia won't come, all right then, *we* go!"

"Hurrah," shouted the children.

"A nice dinner in a restaurant," said Mr. Blom.

"And Wiplala? May we take Wiplala?" asked Nelly Delly.

"Certainly, but in a handbag. And he will have to stay in the bag, while we're in the restaurant."

"Stay in a bag? But then he can't see anything."

"True . . . but that can't be helped. Surely, we couldn't sit in a restaurant with such a little fellow? All the people would stare at him. They might take him away and put him in a museum."

"I don't want that," cried Wiplala.

"I know what," said Nelly Delly. "I have a handbag made partly of transparent plastic. Such a nice little window. We'll put you in there, Wiplala, then you can see everything and nobody can see you, because nobody would look to see what a lady has in her handbag." And she tried to look very prim and ladylike, as you would look in a restaurant.

And so an hour later they sat in the bus. Mr. Blom very neat in his dark blue suit, next to him Johannes with a clean pullover, and next to him Nelly Delly with her small handbag. It was made of red linen and it had a little plastic window in the middle behind which sat Wiplala looking out.

They got out at the park.

"Oh look, let's have dinner there," said Nelly Delly, and she pointed to a very large white hotel near the park. It looked like a palace, so big, so beautiful, so luxurious!

"Nonsense, that is much too expensive and too posh," sighed Mr. Blom. "I daren't go in there."

"But we hardly ever have dinner in town. Can't we, just for once, have it in such a beautiful building?"

"Looks much too expensive and posh to me too," said Johannes. "I daren't go in there either. Let's go to a pancake bar."

"Last time *you* were allowed to choose where we should eat," said Nelly Delly. "And you both promised *I* could next time."

"Yes, that is true," said father. "All right then, just ask Wiplala if he agrees."

Nelly Delly opened her bag and asked: "How do you like that hotel, Wiplala?"

"Does the king live there?" asked Wiplala very excitedly.

"No, it is not a palace. It is a hotel and a restaurant. We want to have dinner there. Do you like that?"

"I do," said Wiplala. So Nelly Delly closed her bag again. They had arrived.

4 *Pixilate, Pixilate*

They went up a marble staircase and through a revolving door, all made of glass, and came into a big hall with gilt columns and wonderful palm trees. Two head waiters dressed in black stood bowing and smiling, and everywhere ladies and gentlemen sat at little tables and there was a nice smell of chicken and of perfume. In the corner a small orchestra was playing a dreamy waltz and on the large white grand piano stood an enormous pink pot of gladioli.

A waiter shot out from a corner, like a jack-in-the-box. He helped Mr. Blom out of his coat and led him to a small table, with snow white napkins and cut glass and silver.

"Lovely, isn't it?" whispered Nelly Delly. "What with the music and all the lights!"

"I think it is horribly smart here," grumbled Johannes.

"You can't put your elbows on the table and you must whisper, and you can't laugh loudly."

"But we are going to have a wonderful dinner," said Mr. Blom. "What do you like? You can get oxtail soup and then fish and then ice cream for dessert. Shall we have that? Waiter!" The waiter came and bowed.

"Oxtail soup for three," said Mr. Blom. "And fried turbot for three and ice cream for three. And mineral water."

When the soup was on the table Johannes whispered: "How can Wiplala eat now? Can he sit on the table?"

"Absolutely not!" said Mr. Blom. "We really can't do that. Everybody would see him and then we would get into awful trouble. But the bag is on the table, so he can see everything. Just open the bag, Nelly Delly, then we can



give him soup *in* the bag. Did you bring a small tea-spoon? That's clever." Nelly Delly fed Wiplala his soup with the tea-spoon in the handbag and that went very well.

"I wish I could come out for a little while," said Wiplala.

"That you can't," said Mr. Blom. "Have you had enough soup? Then we must close the bag again because here comes the waiter."

The waiter brought an enormous silver dish with three quite large fish surrounded by vegetables and tiny little potatoes. It looked so delicious and so festive, and the music was so gay and entertaining, and all the other people in the dining hall were laughing and talking and so boisterous and cheerful, that even Johannes began to enjoy himself and hopped in his chair with enthusiasm.

"Here is a little piece of fish, Wiplala." The bag was opened and Wiplala got a little bit of everything. "Mind you don't make the bag greasy inside," said Nelly Delly. "Do be careful!"

And after that they got an enormous slab of ice cream, with fruit and whipped cream on top. The ice was half green, half pink, and there were bits of nougat on it. Wiplala choked on a piece of nut and coughed for a quarter of an hour, but fortunately the waiters did not notice a thing.

"Well, that's that!" said Mr. Blom. "Now I must pay the bill and then we'll go for a short walk in the town. Waiter!" The waiter came and bowed again.

"May I have the bill, please?" asked Mr. Blom.

The waiter hurried away and soon afterwards returned with a silver tray. On it lay the bill, a piece of paper folded

double. Mr. Blom unfolded the paper. He turned pale and muttered: "But that's impossible."

"What is impossible, Daddy?" asked Johannes.

"Forty-five guilders, seventy cents," said Mr. Blom in dismay. "That is appalling! I simply haven't got it. I have only ten guilders with me."

The waiter stood waiting patiently near their table.

Nelly Delly and Johannes sat there dumbfounded. This was terrible! Now they had eaten everything and they must pay for it, but Daddy didn't have enough money. Oh, it was horrible!

"I . . . I have only got ten guilders," said Mr. Blom to the solemn waiter. This time the waiter did not bow, he did not smile any longer. He suddenly looked like an angry game-keeper.

"Surely you could see the price on the menu," he said icily.

"I didn't look at the price," said Mr. Blom. "I quite forgot to look at the price, and I thought ten guilders was a lot of money."

"Please stay in your seat," said the waiter. "I shall fetch the manager."

"What is a manager?" asked Nelly Delly when he had gone.

"The boss," said Mr. Blom. "Oh dear me, there he is already."

The manager was even more angry than the waiter. He looked stern and also scornful.

"A nice business this," he said. "The second time today."

"But I have never been here before," said Mr. Blom.

"Quite, but this afternoon there was another gentleman who also could not pay."

"I can't help that," said Mr. Blom. "I don't mind going home to fetch some money."

"You might do that," said the manager affably. "Then I shall keep the children here."

"But . . . but . . . I haven't got any money at home either," said Mr. Blom, turning as red as a beetroot. "All I have is ten guilders."

"Then we must call in the police. I am sorry," said the manager. "We cannot tolerate such irregularities. Will you please come with me."

Mr. Blom and the children followed him, dejected and patient, like sheep. They were taken to a small private office, with steel chairs and a desk. There they sat and that nasty hotel man locked the door on the outside and went to warn the police.

Nelly Delly opened the bag and said to Wiplala: "Look here, we didn't have enough money to pay the bill, and so we are locked up and in a moment the police will come to put us in jail."

"Never mind," said Wiplala. "I shall soon pixilate the police into stone."

"No you won't," said Mr. Blom firmly. "No, Wiplala, you are *not* to do that."

"But then we shall be put in jail," sobbed Johannes. "And I am still so young!"

"We shall be in for life," howled Nelly Delly.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Blom. "I don't believe a word of it. But perhaps we shall have to go to the police station. And it is all my fault," he added sadly. "Why didn't I ask first how much it would be?"

"It is my fault," said Nelly Delly. "I wanted to have dinner in this horrid hotel. And do you know what is so awful? Perhaps the police will look in my bag and then they will find Wiplala."

"What! What!" shouted Wiplala. "I won't have it. They mustn't find me. Let me out."

Nelly Delly let him out of her bag. "I shall hide myself in that drawer," said Wiplala. "In the drawer of the writing desk. I don't want them to find me."

"If only we could hide in that drawer as well," said Johannes gloomily. "That would be wonderful. Then the police would come and never find us."

"That is a very good idea," said Wiplala.

"What are you up to, Wiplala?" said Mr. Blom severely. "No funny business. . . ." He suddenly stopped because he felt very queer inside. He felt dizzy, unsteady, and he saw everything around him become terribly big. The chairs grew and grew. The desk which they were now sitting on became as large as a town square, the ball-point pen that was lying on it was as large as the mast of a ship. The reading lamp was as big as a house. Mr. Blom got up and began to walk. He could walk right round the lamp. And then he saw Nelly Delly walking beside him and Johannes too. Wiplala was now as big as Johannes. They were, the four of them, all the same size. They were, all four of them, tiny little

creatures, gnomes on an enormous desk in a gigantic room.

"Oh Wiplala, what fun!" cried Nelly Delly.

"Wiplala, this is scandalous!" cried Mr. Blom.

"Quick! Quick! Into the drawer," said Wiplala. "Quick, into the drawer."

They crawled, the four of them, through a chink in the drawer that was not firmly closed, and sat down at the back in a corner in the dark. And they were just in time, because the door of the office opened and the manager came in with a policeman.

"Here are those swindlers," said the manager, but he stopped suddenly.

"Well, I'm jiggered! They have given us the slip!" he cried. "They are gone. How is that possible? And the door was locked!"

"Through the window?" suggested the policeman. "No, that won't do. The window is too small and too high up for anyone to escape through."

"Quite," said the manager. "They can't have escaped through that window." He walked nervously up and down the office, looked under the chairs, behind the desk, under the desk, and then became furious.

The small group in the drawer sat as quiet as mice. They hardly dared to breathe.

"Well," said the policeman. "Is that what I had to come all the way here for? You must have dreamed it."

"Dreamed it," said the manager furiously. "I locked a man and two children in here. That is as certain as that

twice two makes four. They have had a dinner that cost forty-five guilders and they haven't paid."

"All very well," said the policeman. "But if they aren't here I can't take them into custody."

"That's true," agreed the manager. "I can't understand it at all. Perhaps the cashier let them out by mistake. Will you come with me to the cashier?" And they went out through the door.

"Have they gone?" whispered Johannes. "Then we must try to escape."

"I shall lead the way," said Wiplala. "You follow me." He sneaked out of the drawer, ran across the large top of the desk and slithered down the cord of the reading lamp. Mr. Blom came after him, protesting, and Nelly Delly and Johannes got down safely.

Now they were on the floor. Four little creatures on the office floor, and Wiplala said: "Look, they have left the door open. I shall just do a reconnaissance of the passage. You stay here." When he came back he said: "Come along, the passage is deserted and there is a back door that leads outside." Very cautiously and softly they followed him through the gloomy hotel passage.

"There is somebody coming," said Nelly Delly.

She was right. There was a waiter coming through the passage from the opposite direction. He carried in one hand a tray full of plates and in the other a tray full of glasses.

"Stand still," said Wiplala. "Here, up against the wall. And don't move!" They all stood stock still. The waiter was in a hurry and had nearly passed them, when suddenly

Mr. Blom had to sneeze. He tried to check it but he couldn't.

"Hatshoo," said Mr. Blom. It was only a doll's sneeze, because Mr. Blom was no bigger than a mouse, but it was just loud enough for the waiter to hear. The man stood still and looked in their direction. His eyes began to pop out of his head with terror.

"Run," hissed Wiplala. "Come on, hurry up! Scram!"

He bolted through the passage and the others ran after him. The waiter's eyes grew bigger and bigger. He jumped out of their way and in his terror let both the trays drop from his hands. With a clatter and a din the plates with bits of chicken and bits of ice cream, fell on the floor, splinters of glass scattered all over the passage. From several doors other waiters came rushing to the scene and a few chambermaids called out: "Hi, what are you up to now, Joris?"

"Animals," said Joris plaintively. "Mice . . . mice on their hind legs, with clothes on. Horrible wizard mice. Help, stop them! They have gone outside through the door. Stop them!"

"He is not quite well," said the other waiters. "Joris, you are upset!" They all had a look through the back door, where the hotel garden was. But Mr. Blom and his children and Wiplala had already vanished in the lilac bushes. From the garden they went into the park.

Fortunately it was dark and so they could walk cautiously on the outside of the sidewalk without anybody seeing them.

"Jolly good, we have escaped," sang Wiplala.

"That's what you think," said Mr. Blom. "And what are we now! Small gnomes! How can I do my work and write

my books, now that I am no bigger than a half-grown frog?"

"We are back home again," said Nelly Delly. "Just look how big our house has become."

"We can't reach the front door," said Johannes. "How can we get in?"

"At the back, through the slipway for the cat," said Mr. Blom.

And that is what they did.

5 *The House is Too Big*

“Here we are,” said Mr. Blom. “The size of mice in a giant of a house.”

Yes, there they were. Mr. Blom, the two children and little naughty Wiplala who had bewitched them all, so that they were no bigger than a fair-sized middle finger.

They sat on the floor under the table, which was now a gigantic table, and next to them sat the cat, Fly, who was now a gigantic cat, but fortunately just as fond of them as ever, purring all the time and rubbing his head against them.

Nelly Delly had lit the stove in her dolls' house with a few chips of wood and on it simmered a little saucepan with two potatoes, enormous potatoes. That was their supper, and it was ample for them. The big white loaf from the cup-

board also lay on the floor, on a plastic cloth, with the cheese. They had had an awful job getting it out of the cupboard. Johannes and Wiplala had climbed together into the cupboard, they had dragged the loaf from the bin and thrown it down, also the cheese. The butter they had left. You can't throw that down without making a mess.

It was just like camping and Johannes and Nelly Delly loved it. Not far away on the floor lay the rails of Johannes' electric train. They had a transformer and for hours they drove round and round in the freight car while Johannes, as the driver, sat in the engine. And when they had had enough of that they went for a ride on pussy's back. Fly didn't mind at all, he jumped them on to chairs and tables and climbed up the curtains, while Nelly Delly, Johannes and Wiplala held on to his fur, yelling and screaming. It really was a wonderful place for games, this gigantic house. You could now play hide and seek under the piano. You could have a race from one end of the room to the other, you could make a seesaw out of a tea tray and a foot stool, and you could swing in the shopping basket that was hanging on a nail.

Mr. Blom did not join in the fun. Mr. Blom had to work, wasn't he writing a book? So he said every morning: "Well, I am going to do a spot of work." Then he climbed laboriously up a chair leg, hoisted himself on to a chair, pulled himself up by the table cloth, and sat down on top of the table. And then he began to type and that was terribly difficult, for the typewriter was, of course, enormous. After a long struggle he managed to get the paper in place and then he started typing. He stamped with his foot on the "b,"

then jumped right on to “i,” skipping a line, then back to “g.” He had typed the word “big.” But by the time he had typed two sentences this way, he was dog tired and had to lie down on the doll’s bed for a rest.

Every morning they all went swimming in the bath. With a combined effort they could turn the tap, run a bath and turn it off again. They swam happily to and fro for a quarter of an hour and then they rolled themselves, the four of them, in one towel.

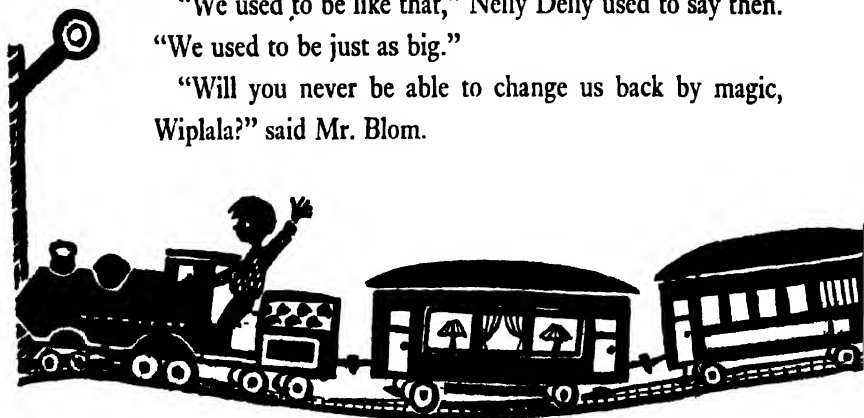
Fortunately all the doors stood ajar, so that they could go in and out everywhere. If they wanted to they could also slip out through the cat door, but they did not quite dare. Just imagine if somebody saw them! What would happen? Wicked strangers might kidnap them and show them at the fair. Oh no, nobody, nobody, ought to see them.

Sometimes the children suddenly found that rather sad. Especially when they sat on Fly’s back, jumped on to the window sill and looked out. Then they saw the people in the street, very large people and very large children, like giants.

“We used to be like that,” Nelly Delly used to say then.

“We used to be just as big.”

“Will you never be able to change us back by magic, Wiplala?” said Mr. Blom.





Wiplala nervously bit his little nails and said shyly: "Perhaps I can. I hope some day I can. I know you have got to swallow something, some stuff, something to eat, but I don't remember what it is called. Perhaps it will come back to me some day."

"Can you get it at the chemist?" asked Johannes hopefully.

"I don't know," said Wiplala vaguely. "I don't know what a chemist is."

Johannes was just going to explain what a chemist is when suddenly Nelly Delly put up her finger and said: "Ssssst . . . listen! I hear something." They all listened. Mr. Blom, who was busy with his typewriter, also listened, one foot in the air.

"I hear a key in the front door lock," said Johannes. "Who can that be?"

"That is Mrs. Dingemans of course. It is Friday, isn't it? Mrs. Dingemans has come to do the cleaning and she has the key."

"We must slip away," said Mr. Blom anxiously. "She must not find us. Let's crawl away."

Nelly Delly looked hastily round for a hiding place that would be safe from Mrs. Dingemans and her vacuum cleaner. They heard her walking in the passage. Now she stood still, hanging her coat on a peg. Now she began to hum.

"In the bag—quickly, in the shopping bag."

They hurriedly helped Mr. Blom down the table and in a jiffy the four of them flopped into the shopping bag that

hung on the wall. Just in time, for the door opened and Mrs. Dingemans came in.

She looked round in surprise and said: "Well pussy, are you all alone? Is there nobody at home?"

"Miaow," said Fly.

"What a mess!" said Mrs. Dingemans. "Everything on the floor, bread and cheese and look—the doll's stove is burning!"

"Miaow," said Fly.

"Well, I had better clear it up," said Mrs. Dingemans, and put the bread and the cheese back in the cupboard.

Inside the shopping basket Johannes and Nelly Delly whispered to each other: "What a job it will be to lug the bread down again. Shouldn't we show ourselves?"

"No," Whispered Mr. Blom. "Definitely not. She must not find us."

"Come on," said Mrs. Dingemans aloud to herself. "First let's take all those empty milk bottles to the dairy." And that was that; she took the shopping basket. She felt it was heavy so there must be something in it. She looked and saw what was in it.

She gave a yell and dropped the bag on the floor.

"Ouch . . . ouch," they all groaned inside the bag. That had been jolly rough treatment. Johannes wept and Nelly Delly whimpered.

"O-oooooh!" wailed Mrs. Dingemans. "Bewitched! This house is bewitched. I must hop it." And she grabbed the doorknob to scurry away.

"Mrs. Dingemans!" called Nelly Delly. "Mrs. Dingemans!"

"What has happened here?" groaned Mrs. Dingemans. "A bag full of gnomes. And they can talk!"

"We are not gnomes," said Johannes, and he stuck his head out of the bag. "Just look at us. I am Johannes, and this one here is Nelly Delly, and look this is our father."

Mr. Blom also stuck his head out of the bag and said solemnly, "Good day, Mrs. Dingemans."

"But . . . you are gnomes," said Mrs. Dingemans nervously. "And who is that?" She pointed at Wiplala.

"I shall explain, Mrs. Dingemans," said Nelly Delly. "We are bewitched."

"Pixilated, I call it," said Wiplala.

"All right then, pixilated. He calls it pixilated, Mrs. Dingemans. He is a wiplala, that is a kind of gnome, and he has come to live with us. But a few days ago we went to a restaurant and we could not pay the bill, and he changed us into very small creatures so that we could escape. You understand?"

"I only understand that it is a gruesome story," said Mrs. Dingemans indignantly. "And must you remain as small as that for ever and ever?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Blom. "But don't tell anybody, dear Mrs. Dingemans. People wouldn't leave us in peace, they would catch us and exhibit us for money. I beg of you not to tell anybody."

"Dear me, no," said Mrs. Dingemans. "I shall be silent as the grave. Don't you worry, my little man—oh, beg

pardon Mr. Blom—now I called you ‘little man’. Please forgive me but you are so small.”

“I don’t blame you,” said Mr. Blom rather bitterly.

“Now, what can I do for you?” said Mrs. Dingemans.

“Would you do some shopping for us?” asked Nelly Delly. “We need more dolls’ forks and dolls’ spoons, and a dolls’ bread bin and a dolls’ bread knife and a dolls’ butter dish, and . . . a lot more.”

In the evening, when Mrs. Dingemans had gone home again, they all sat round a small table underneath the big table. And they ate very nicely with knives and forks. They had a whole dolls’ dinner service and lovely food on the table. They had salad and fruit and cream, everything within reach. And the entire house was clean again, as it always was on Friday.

“Now she will be coming every day to look after us,” said Nelly Delly.

“Yes,” said Mr. Blom. “That is all very well, but do you believe she will never tell anybody?”

“Perhaps her husband,” said Johannes.

“Good heavens, then the man may gossip, and we will all be in danger. And what shall we do?”

“Don’t worry, Daddy,” said Nelly Delly. “In any case we shall sleep comfortably in our new dolls’ beds. We have got four new ones.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Blom. “And in any case we have each other. We shall stick together whatever happens.”

“Me too?” asked Wiplala, very sweet and modest.

“You too, Wiplala dear,” said Nelly Delly. “You belong

to us. And if we should always remain as we are now, just tiny little things, then that would not matter either. We shall have a lovely time together, the four of us.”

And they went to sleep between the dolls’ sheets and the dolls’ blankets.

And Fly, the cat, kept watch.

6 *Atlàs*

“What’s that?” said Nelly Delly. “What is all that noise outside our front door?”

“There are lots of people in the street,” said Johannes, who had climbed on to the window sill. “Perhaps a hundred! And they are pointing at our house.”

By now they had been gnomes for a week: Mr. Blom, Johannes, Nelly Delly, and, of course, Wiplala, but then he had never been bigger. The others were small gnomes in their own big house. They were not unhappy, but rather lonely, because apart from the cleaning woman there had been nobody to talk to all that time.

“Good heavens, I see Mrs. Dingemans’ husband. So she *did* tell him that we had shrunk. And now suddenly all the people want to have a look. I even see the burgomaster.

And a policeman! Oh Daddy, I am frightened. Let's hide," said Nelly Dely. "Oh please, let's crawl away."

"But surely, they can't come in?"

"They can! Just listen, they are coming in. All of them. They are inside!"

It was an uncanny sound, all those people in the passage, muttering and coming closer, and in a few moments they would open the door of the room.

"Where should we hide? Where? They will find us, of course, wherever we are. They will look in the cupboards and under the furniture, in all the holes and corners! Oh . . . Daddy . . ." Nelly Dely kept running round nervously, while Mr. Blom and Johannes stood numb with fear.

"I shall pixilate them all and turn them into stone," said Wiplala, who placed himself in front of them and clenched his fist.

"No, don't, Wiplala, don't," said Mr. Blom. "I have an idea." He scrambled through the dumb-waiter and they followed. They climbed after him through the open kitchen window. "And now, the creeper," he whispered. They climbed after him into the Virginia creeper. And there they sat, hidden by the big leaves, and listened to the murmur of many voices inside their house.

"Nonsense," they heard someone shouting. "Gnomes don't exist."

They heard Mr. Dingemans saying: "But my wife has seen them with her own eyes. I shall find them even if I have to turn the whole house upside down."

Johannes and Nelly Dely shivered. They were suddenly

terrified of people, those big, big people, when they themselves were so very, very small.

"They will never find us here," said Mr. Blom. "What a mean fellow, to force his way into our house."

"Help . . ." screamed Nelly Delly. "Oh help!"

"Be quiet, darling. What is the matter?"

"A spider!" Nelly Delly panted. "A spider as big as a dog!"

A huge spider sat quite close to them among the leaves of the creeper. He watched them as if he were wondering whether those funny animals would be nice to eat.

"He won't do anything," said Johannes with a trembling voice.

"Not now in any case," said Wiplala. "Just look!" They looked again and they saw a spider of stone. Wiplala had pixilated him. Nelly Delly and Johannes roared with laughter.

"Poor old spider," said Johannes. "When we are big again you must pixilate him back, Wiplala."

"When we are big again," sighed Mr. Blom. "Shall we ever be normal people again? My dear Wiplala, can't you really remember the name of that stuff that will turn us into normal people?"

"I am brooding over it always and always," said Wiplala. "But it won't come back to me." He looked very guilty. Then suddenly he said something in a strange language. A very strange language. He seemed to be cooing like a dove.

"What did you say?" asked Nelly Delly. But then she realized that Wiplala was not talking to them, but to some-

one else. She leaned forward to see between the leaves of the creeper, whom he was talking to. It was a pigeon. A big, fat, comfortable, motherly pigeon.

"Wiplala can talk with pigeons," said Nelly Delly.

"So I hear," said Johannes.

"The pigeon is willing to take us with him," said Wiplala hurriedly. "Do you want that?"

"Where to?" asked Mr. Blom.

"Anywhere we like," said Wiplala.

"Let's do it," said Johannes. "On the back of a pigeon. Super!"

"In any case we can't stay here," said Mr. Blom. "I daren't go inside my own house, as long as we are so small."

Wiplala was carrying on a conversation with the pigeon.

"Ask him if he knows a place where we can hide ourselves," said Mr. Blom. "Somewhere where there are no human beings."

Wiplala cooed something. The pigeon cooed back.

"She says she knows a very safe place, where nobody ever comes."

"Let's go then. Are those people still in our house?"

They listened and heard the people noisily rummaging through the entire house.

Quick then! The pigeon sat on the water-barrel, and they nimbly climbed down the Virginia creeper and got on to her back. There they sat, the four of them on one pigeon!

Wiplala sat behind, then Nelly Delly, then Johannes, and in front, close to her head, sat Mr. Blom, who muttered: "Oh dear, if only we are not too heavy for her!"



The pigeon spread her wings and rose with alarming speed. There they flew. They held on tight to the downy feathers on her back and saw the garden falling away beneath them. They saw their own house below, the houses next door, they saw the nearby streets and they felt dizzy. The pigeon's wings made a tremendous rushing sound, and they now realized how strong her wings were.

I bet you the other boys would stare if they could see me, thought Johannes, and he grinned.

"Where are we going to?" cried Mr. Blom. "Where is she taking us?"

"I don't know," said Wiplala.

"To the middle of the town," shouted Johannes. "Look, don't you see?"

They flew over the Ryksmuseum. They saw the canals and now they were flying over the Kalverstreet.

"We are going to the Dam Square," called Nelly Delly. "That creature is taking us to the Dam Square. Good heavens, and she was going to take us to a place where there are no human beings!"

It was true, the pigeon flew to the Dam Square. But she flew very high. She circled round the monument, then round the palace, and then she swooped down. On the palace. At the back of the palace, on a sort of little stone platform.

"She says we have arrived," said Wiplala.

"Well I never," said Mr. Blom. "Here? On the roof of the palace? What does she mean?"

They climbed down from the back of the pigeon. And there they stood.

"Ask her if she can't take us somewhere else," said Mr. Blom. "I begin to feel dizzy here. I must sit down."

"She says it is quite safe here," declared Wiplala, after he had talked to the pigeon.

"Oh dear, there she flies away. The pigeon has flown away!"

"She has still an awful lot to do," said Wiplala. "She's busy with eggs and babies and that sort of thing."

"But what are we going to do here? Right on the top of the palace. Nothing but stones all round. Oh, look, we are quite close to Atlas!"

"Is that Atlas?" asked Johannes, and he pointed to a very large statue next to him, a man with a huge ball on his neck.

"That is Atlas," said his father. "Atlas was a Greek god

and he carried the whole world on his neck, the whole earth. You see, that is the globe."

"Dear me," said Nelly Delly. "How long has he been standing there?"

"For ages," said Mr. Blom. "What are you doing now, Wiplala?"

Wiplala was busily moving his hands about.

"You are not going to turn him into stone? He is made of stone already," cried Johannes.

"He is making him alive," whispered Nelly Delly. And to their amazement the stone Atlas moved. He heaved a deep sigh and lifted the big globe far above his head as if he were going to hurl the thing down. Then he laughed and put the globe at his bare feet.

"You are human beings, aren't you? I always see the like of you when I look down. There they are, the place is teeming with them." And he pointed down to the Boulevard, where cars and trams seemed to be crawling and hundreds of little figures crowded the pavement.

Mr. Blom was dumbfounded. He looked at the huge Atlas, who stood there cheerfully chatting with them as if he had never been made of stone in his life. Just imagine if all those people down there look up, he thought. Won't they be scared when they see that Atlas has put down his globe! But apparently nobody thought of looking up. Everybody was in a great hurry, people scurried along the Boulevard.

"I say, Mr. Atlas," said Johannes. "Could you show us how to get *into* the palace from here? I would love to go inside."

"Inside . . ." said Atlas and hesitated. "Well, you see, I

have been up here for hundreds of years, but I have never been inside. Do you mind if I scratch? I have had an itch on my back for the last one hundred and fifty years." He scratched himself slowly and thoroughly.

"Well?" said Mr. Blom when he had finished.

"That was lovely," said Atlas. "I needed that badly. Oh yes, you wanted to get into the palace. Now let me see . . . I know a small window. Yes, I know a small window, you follow me . . . or shall I pick you up?" He bent down and grabbed Nelly Delly and Wiplala in one hand, Johannes and Mr. Blom in the other and stepped across a huge stone parapet. "Here we are," he said. "Here is a half open window. Shall I lift you up?"

"Please," said Mr. Blom.

Atlas lifted them through the window and there they stood on the window sill.

"There you are," said Atlas. "I am glad I could do something for you."

Then he became rather nervous, and he said: "Oh dear, oh dear, I have left my globe for far too long. I have got to put the thing on my neck again. Otherwise the world will come to an end. Quick, quick, otherwise the world will come to an end." And he rushed back to his former place, lifted the globe and put the enormous thing on his neck, moaning and groaning.

"Change him back into stone, Wiplala," said Mr. Blom. "Quick, then he won't feel the weight so much."

Wiplala did as he was told. Very shortly afterwards Atlas stood stock still.

"Poor old Atlas," said Nelly Delly. "He really believes that the world will come to an end if he hasn't got that thing on his neck. In that case he had better be stone."

Then they all turned round and looked at the room they were in. It was a small room and there was hardly anything in it. A few old-fashioned kitchen chairs, a table and a large bed.

"That silly pigeon," sighed Nelly Delly. "The Royal Palace. . . ."

"In any case we are safe here," said Mr. Blom. "It is true that we have nothing to eat, but we can think things over and decide at leisure what we are going to do."

"Go to sleep," said Johannes. "First, sleep in this comfortable bed."

"Good idea," said Wiplala. "And then we shall see."

They stretched themselves out on top of the bed.

Far below them in the street stood a little girl. She held her hand over her eyes and stared upwards. Then she ran to her father who was standing in front of a cake shop.

"Daddy," she said. "I saw that statue on top of the palace run away and come back again."

"What?" said the father. "What statue?"

"That one over there," she pointed out.

"Atlas? Running away? My dear child, that is a statue made of stone."

"I know, but it is really true. I saw him putting down his ball and then he scratched himself. And then he ran away and came back again."

“Darling, you have been dreaming,” said her father.
“That is impossible.”

“But it is really true,” said the child.

“Come along now, I will get you an ice cream,” said the father.

But the child was sad because her father would not believe her.

7 *In the Palace*

"Where am I" asked Mr. Blom.

"In the palace, in Dam Square," said Johannes.

"But what am I doing there?" asked Mr. Blom sleepily.

He had just woken up and looked around in amazement. He saw them all lying in an enormous bed, and he was completely baffled.

"Listen," said Nelly Delly. "We have all come to the Royal Palace on the back of that very nice pigeon. Atlas put us inside, don't you remember now?"

"Yes I do," said Mr. Blom. "Oh dear, how very unpleasant it all was!"

"Unpleasant! Not at all!" said Johannes. "Jolly nice! Now we are seeing something of the world. It's wonderful to be so small. You can hide everywhere without being

caught. You can fly on the back of a bird. Surely that was a lovely trip on that pigeon?"

"All very well," said Mr. Blom. "But what are we going to do here, in this enormous palace? How can we get out? And then, if we are outside, where can we go? We can't go back to our own house, that is too dangerous. Do you realize?" Mr. Blom continued, and his voice was rather anxious, "do you realize that we have become poor little refugees? That we don't belong anywhere in the world? That we are banished from the world of human beings?"

Nelly Delly and Johannes looked at their father, quite shocked.

"What do you mean, Daddy?"

"We shall always have to live as poor fugitives," said their father. "We shall always have to hide, wherever we may be. We shall always be in danger when there are human beings about. When they discover us, they are sure to treat us badly."

"Then let's go right away," said Johannes. "I mean away to the country, to a wood. There we could live in a small hole."

"And be eaten by wild animals," grumbled Mr. Blom. "Because now that we are so small, a crow might peck us to death, and a weasel could kill us."

"Oh no," whispered Wiplala. "I will see to it that that won't happen. I shall pixilate them all, every beast that wants to attack us. Don't worry, Daddy."

"Hm," muttered Mr. Blom. "I hadn't thought of that."

It's true that you could help us enormously, Wiplala. So the best thing might be to go right away to a wood."

"Perhaps we could find another pigeon to take us there," said Nelly Delly.

"Go and see if you can't find another pigeon on the roof, Wiplala."

"I don't know all the pigeons," said Wiplala. "Yesterday's was a friend of mine."

"But you can understand pigeons, can't you? You know their language? And they can understand you? Surely you can talk with every pigeon?"

"That's true," said Wiplala. "All right, I will try and find one." He clambered nimbly on the window sill and crawled on to the roof outside.

"I am so hungry," said Johannes. "I suppose there is nothing to eat?"

"Of course not," said Nelly Delly. "And it is time for breakfast. Wouldn't there be somebody in this palace? What about the Queen?"

"No," said Mr. Blom. "The Queen is not here. She only comes here very rarely. But there ought to be a caretaker. Probably more than one, I should think. They live here always. But I don't hear anybody. Do you?"

They listened. It was dead quiet. Then the bells in the steeple suddenly chimed.

"Here I am again," said Wiplala, and he crawled back through the window. "That jingling noise frightened me, but it is only the bells."

"Did you talk to a pigeon?"

"No, only to a sparrow. And he wouldn't do it. He says he is not strong enough to carry four of us. And he also said he didn't want to play taxi. Sparrows are cheeky. They are guttersnipes!"

"We are so hungry," said Johannes. "Can't you pixilate some food together for us, Wiplala?"

"Oh, please do try!" begged Nelly Delly. "Look, here in the corner are some cardboard boxes. Can't you change those into bread and butter and cheese and boiled egg and jam and an apple?"

"I will try," sighed Wiplala. He stood in front of the cardboard boxes. They were a little bigger than matchboxes. He shut his eyes, sighed again, muttered something, moved his fingers and said: "There you are!"

"What? But Wiplala, they are still boxes. Or no, wait! They are of stone now. They are stone boxes. Wiplala, where is all that nice food now?" Nelly Delly looked at him reproachfully.

"It won't work," said Wiplala, looking really desperate. "You know, that *sometimes* I can pixilate and *sometimes* I can't. And now today it's no good. I can't do a thing!"

"Then let's snoop around the palace," said Mr. Blom. "Very cautiously, of course, and on tiptoe. Perhaps there is a kitchen somewhere downstairs. Who knows, we may find something to eat. After all, the caretakers must eat."

They all got up from the big soft bed, slithered down on the floor and discovered that their small room was locked.

"There you are now," said Mr. Blom. "Locked in, if you please!"

"We can get through the chink at the bottom," said Wiplala.

He was right, there was quite a big gap underneath the door. They lay down on their tummies and tried to wriggle through. It was difficult and very tight, but after much groaning and squeezing they managed.

"Oh," said Nelly Delly. "A good thing that gap was there. I don't think they keep the palace very clean. My blouse is pitch black with dust. And all of you look filthy. Oh look, there is a staircase!"

"Careful, children when you go down," said Mr. Blom. "Come on, we'll slide down the banister, that is much easier than going down the steps." That was wonderful. They slid down the banisters of four stairs, and Johannes and Nelly Delly crowed with delight at the speed.

"Ssst, and now walk very quietly," said Mr. Blom. "We are in the hall."

"But this is beautiful!" said Nelly Delly. "Look! All marble and pillars and paintings on the ceiling. Just look at it!"

"I don't want marble and I don't want paintings," grumbled Johannes. "All I want is three slices of bread and butter and a boiled egg."

They walked for a long time through the huge apartments of the Royal Palace. Very cautiously they sneaked along the edges and never ventured into the middle of the rooms.

"I believe this is the big reception hall," said Mr. Blom. "It is all very fine, but we definitely won't find any food here."

Let's go somewhere else." They came into a room full of statues and paintings.

Then suddenly they heard a voice calling out: "Hi, what's that?"

They looked up, scared stiff, and they saw a man coming towards them. A man in a blue coat with brass buttons. He looked like a very dignified guard in a museum. They only saw him for a second, then they turned tail and ran away as fast as they could, Wiplala in the lead. He shot, quick as lightning, through a door, the others followed. They could hear the footsteps of the approaching guard on the marble floor. Clonck, clonck, clonck . . . heavy, hollow footsteps. He had seen them and he wanted to catch them. They had . . . oh dear . . . no time to look for shelter. Wiplala was the first to see that coat. It was a man's coat, hanging over a low stool, so that the pocket touched the floor. And that pocket gaped invitingly. Nimble Wiplala jumped into it and the others followed suit. They simply slid down to the bottom of the pocket, where there was an awful smell of tobacco. They sat there quite still, panting but without making a noise, deep down in the dark pocket.

The guard was now quite close to the stool with the coat. Had he seen them crawling into it? Would he put his hand into the pocket? No, they heard him muttering to himself, they heard him pushing chairs and fussing around. Apparently he was looking for them, looking underneath everything, grumbling because he could not find them.

"He won't find us, goody," whispered Wiplala.

"Ssssst," said Mr. Blom.

Suddenly they heard another voice. Also a man's voice. "Are you looking for something?" said the voice.

"No, or rather . . ." said the guard, a bit perplexed. "I stood there in the gallery and then I saw a kind of . . . small animals."

"What kind of animals?"

"Well, I first thought mice perhaps. But they walked on their hind legs and they had clothes on."

"Ha, ha," roared the other man. "My dear fellow, you need a holiday. Mice with clothes on! He, he!" He bellowed with laughter. He obviously thought it was a huge joke. "Well," he continued. "That job is done. The circuit has been repaired and I have checked the fuse box and renewed the fuses. Now, where are my tools? Oh, here they are. Well, I'm off. So long!"

"So long," said the guard. "Send me the bill in my name, mate. And could you get me a few bulbs for the ceiling?"

"Okay, I will," said the other. Down in the coat pocket they realized that he was an electrician who had done repairs.

"I like frosted bulbs," said the guard. "They were sort of gnomes."

"What!" cried the electrician. "What do you mean?"

"Those little animals. They weren't animals, they were a kind of gnome."

The electrician again roared with laughter.

"That's a good one," he said. "You live in a big palace and you see gnomes! You really ought to go away for a bit.

When you live in a palace for so long, you begin to see all sorts of things that don't exist."

"Maybe," said the guard, in a tired voice.

"Well, so long," said the electrician. "I nearly forgot my coat."

And suddenly the little creatures inside the pocket felt themselves lifted up, coat and all.

8 *Honey Cake for Breakfast*

Inside the pocket Mr. Blom and Nelly Delly were anxiously holding on to each other's sleeve. Wiplala and Johannes also grabbed one another.

What was the electrician going to do now? He seemed to be standing still in the street. They felt the air outside and they heard the roar of the cars and the whistle of the traffic cop. Suddenly they heard a terrible noise right underneath them. The man was sitting on his motorbike, and had started the engine. . . . And there they went, driving fast through the streets of Amsterdam. It was a din and a racket and it jolted terribly. Moreover they could not see a thing, in that dark pocket.

Where would the electrician take them? And would he find them presently? Any moment he might put his hand in

his coat pocket and then they were lost. Mr. Blom felt a packet of cigarettes close to him, and a box of matches too. The man was bound to want a cigarette sometime and then he would have to put his hand in his pocket.

"We must keep the cigarettes and the matches above our heads," shouted Mr. Blom. It was quite safe to shout, the buzz of the engine drowned everything.

Together they lifted the packet of cigarettes and the matches so high that they could sit underneath them. With every jolt the box came down bang on their heads, not a pleasant feeling!

And yes, there it was! The hand of the electrician! He grabbed the cigarettes and the matches, but he did not grope down deeper in his pocket.

They all heaved a sigh of relief.

Johannes thought: "Now I have always wanted to sit on a motorbike. But who would have thought that I would do it this way, in the pocket of an electrician?"

They stopped. The electrician propped the motorbike up and went into a house. It must be a shop, because they heard a little bell jingle when he opened the door.

A woman's voice said: "So, there you are at last. We let you know three days ago that we had a short circuit and we don't know where. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"Well, we were very busy," said the electrician. "A shortage of staff, you see. But show me what the trouble is."

He took off his coat and put it on the floor.

"I will show you," said the woman's voice. "This way."

They went into a room at the back of the shop. Johannes warily stuck his head out of the pocket and had a good look round. There was a delicious smell of cheese and vanilla cookies, also of smoked eel and oranges. "Come on," he said. "There is nobody about. It is too early still for customers. And the lady of the shop is way off in the living-room with the electrician."

The others now also crawled out of the pocket and had a look round.

"A grocer's shop," said Mr. Blom.

"A fruit shop," said Nelly Delly.

"A fish shop," said Wiplala.

"It is all three," said Johannes. And so it was!

It was one of those lovely delicatessen stores where you can get all sorts of good things to eat.

"Now we can have breakfast," cried Johannes. "What do you want? Cheese? Or sausage? Goodness me, there is such a lot and it all smells delicious."

"We really ought not to steal," said Mr. Blom. "But we are very hungry, and we are *very* small. We have got such tiny tummies. I think that just for once we might have some of all this."

Nelly Delly pounced on a large yellow plum. Wiplala ate raisins, and Johannes had got hold of a slice of cheese. Mr. Blom had not yet finished arguing. He did not eat, he talked: "Look," he said. "I find this picking and stealing scandalous. It simply isn't done, but, on the other hand, I could explain it later on. Later, when we are normal big people again, then I shall call at the shop and explain everything."

"Do eat something, Daddy," said Nelly Delly. "Look, I have just tackled the liver sausage."

"And I have found the cookies!" shouted Johannes.

"When we are big again," continued Mr. Blom. "Then we shall all come back to this shop to pay for what we have eaten. Of course I haven't got any money now. But wait, I ought still to have that banknote of ten guilders in my pocket." Mr. Blom fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and got out a tiny wallet. From that wallet emerged a tiny banknote. "Too small," he muttered. "They would hardly be able to see what it is, it is smaller than a postage stamp. No, I'd better keep it in my pocket."

"Come on, Daddy. Have something to eat," cried Nelly Delly. "They may be back in the shop soon!"

Mr. Blom let his eyes roam over all those delicacies, ginger in syrup, and tinned herring, almonds and crystallized fruit, peaches and shrimps, biscuits and pickles, ratafia and lemonade and . . . he felt almost dizzy, it was all too big and too much for such tiny creatures as they were now.

"Somebody coming . . . quick, quick!" cried Johannes. "Sneak in there, in that cupboard under the counter!"

"Here," cried Nelly Delly. They followed her and heaved themselves up on the lower shelf of a crammed cupboard. There they hid themselves between a jar of peanut butter and a very large honey cake. It was quite safe and peaceful there.

They heard the lady of the shop and the electrician come back into the shop, quite close to them, but they were no longer frightened. If the shop owner should take something

from their shelf they could still hide behind the jars and the honey cake at the back because their shelf was crowded and they were so small.

"We can stay here for a long time," said Nelly Delly. "We can eat as much as we like. Oh Daddy, you haven't eaten anything yet. Do have a piece of cake!"

Mr. Blom hesitated. He really thought it was so dreadful, to come to a completely strange shop, belonging to completely strange people, and steal their completely strange honey cake, that he could hardly move. But in the end his appetite got the upper hand. He tore the paper off the very large honey cake and took a bite.

"We want some too," cried Johannes. "We haven't had much breakfast yet!" They all fell upon the cake. They



nibbled greedily, dug their little teeth into it and ate quite a tunnel through the cake. Four small gnomes and one very large cake!

"It is much nicer here than in the palace," said Nelly Delly.

"And how!" said the others with their mouths full. Yes, it was a wonderful breakfast. But afterwards? After that it was not much fun. They could hardly move on that crowded shelf. They dared not show themselves, for the shop was crowded with people all day long. When one customer left another came in, sometimes there were ten at a time in the shop. The back of the lady was quite close to them as she served. They were bored, bored stiff they were. It was even dangerous to talk, they hardly dared whisper.

"Tonight we must find some place in the store-room," said Mr. Blom softly. "Surely there ought to be a store-room somewhere at the back of the shop?"

No sooner had he said that than the shop owner turned round and grabbed a pot of mustard on their shelf.

As she did this she happened to see the cake with the torn paper and took the cake off the shelf. Mr. Blom and the others quickly crawled into the darkest corner, behind some packets of macaroni.

"Dash it all," cried the lady. "That's the limit. Mice! Mice have nibbled the cake. Ali! Ali!"

Ali, a girl of about fifteen, came running.

"Ali, look at that! We have got mice! Presently you must clear everything off that shelf, will you? Have a good look to see if there are any mouse droppings and clean the place up.

We must put out a trap tonight and leave the cat in the shop. Think of it, mice! I haven't had a mouse in the shop for the last ten years. Will you scrub that shelf straightaway, Ali?"

"Yes, I will," said Ali.

The little creatures on the shelf trembled with fear. What to do now? They were certain to be discovered. They could not possibly crawl from one shelf to another without being discovered. And presently Ali would find them, when she took away all the packages and jars.

They looked at one another helplessly and Nelly Delly began to cry. Wiplala's eyes again had that mischievous expression, he would have loved to pixilate everybody in the shop into stone. But Mr. Blom said softly: "No pixilation, you understand?"

"Yes, Daddy. No, Daddy," said Wiplala.

"We must hope they won't be unkind to us," said Mr. Blom with a trembling voice. "We shall see "

There was Ali already, with her brush and a cloth to clean the place. She began to take away the jars and packages that stood in front. She had not seen anything yet, they were right at the back.

Suddenly there was a screeching noise of brakes in the street.

"A collision," cried the customers, and they all ran to the door and to the shop window to see what had happened.

The shop owner and Ali also left everything and ran to the front part of the shop to see if there really had been an accident. But it wasn't a real accident, there had only nearly been a collision. Everybody turned round again towards the

counter. And the shop owner and Ali went on with their work.

“All that traffic nowadays is so dangerous,” said the owner. “Have you finished that shelf, Ali?”

“I don’t see any mouse droppings,” said Ali. “I have cleared away the jars and bags from the shelf. But I don’t see anything.”

“All the better,” said the owner. “But we had better leave the cat in the shop tonight all the same.”

On the floor, behind a big pile of cheeses, sat Mr. Blom, Wiplala, Nelly Delly and Johannes, trembling. When everybody had turned round to see the accident, they had shot down the shelf as quick as lightning and in those few seconds they had just managed to find a hiding-place. But for how long would they be safe now? For how long? Would they be discovered here just the same?

9 *The Basket of Fruit*

They were not discovered. The whole day they weren't discovered. At about six o'clock the owner put all the eels and herrings and sausages in the ice box; she tidied up a bit everywhere. Ali swept the floor, but thank goodness, she forgot to sweep behind the cheeses.

"That's that, and now the cat in the shop," said the owner.

The little family sat stock still, until the shop had been closed and the owner and Ali had disappeared.

Then Wiplala looked very cautiously from behind a cheese. He quickly drew back his head and whispered: "He is sitting there."

"Who, the cat?"

"Yes, a big cat."

Nelly Delly also looked round a corner and saw him too.

It was a beautiful black tom cat with a white front, white whiskers and white feet. A very nice tom cat. The entire Blom family was fond of cats and they would have loved to go and stroke him. But when you are as small as a mouse then you are as easily scared as mice, and that is what they were. Scared as mice.

"Actually we are no better than mice," said Mr. Blom. "We pilfer cake and cheese and when the cat arrives we hide in a corner."

"He is sniffing us already," cried Johannes. "He is coming this way."

"Shall I . . ." began Wiplala, and he already moved his hands.

"Yes, Wiplala," said Mr. Blom gravely. "However sorry I am, I believe that it is better to take certain precautions here. That cat is a danger to our lives. We can't run away or climb on a shelf because he is quicker than we are. Dear Wiplala, I do hope you will be able to undo it later on, but now I feel you ought to pixilate the cat."

"He has done it already, Father," said Johannes. "Look, the cat is turned to stone."

They now emerged from behind the cheeses. There stood the cat, his sniffing nose in the air, one front paw lifted up, a splendid little black statue.

"Poor pussy," said Nelly Delly gently. "I do hope you needn't remain stone for very long."

"Well," said Mr. Blom. "Now we must consider how we can get away from here. We must get out of this shop, that is certain. It is too dangerous here. By day there are too

many people. By night there is a cat. It's true that the cat is now stone, but when the owner finds out tomorrow that her cat has been turned to stone, she will make a terrible fuss."

"May we poke around here a bit longer?" asked Nelly Delly.

"All right," said her father. "But don't eat too much now. We have had plenty."

It was very difficult not to nibble. There were cherries and plums and lovely pink peaches. There was dried fruit of all kinds. They took tiny bites out of everything.

"Look at me," said Nelly Delly. She was sitting on top of a huge fruit cake. And Wiplala sat among the figs. And Johannes, where was Johannes?

"Help," they heard someone calling. It was the voice of Johannes.

"Where are you then? Johannes, where are you?"

"Here! In the barrel! Help, I am drowning, I am losing my grip. Do help me!"

They all rushed to the side where the voice came from. There stood a barrel full of gherkins in vinegar. Johannes had ended up inside it. With difficulty he was holding on to two gherkins floating in a sea of vinegar, but every now and again he went down up to his neck. It was awful to watch.

They had quite a struggle to get Johannes on dry land. He smelled very sour and looked like a wet rag.

Mr. Blom said rather sternly: "That comes from . . ." But he suddenly stopped. They all stood stock still because, quite close to them in the shop two human voices could be heard. Without saying another word they all looked for shelter.

Near-by stood a large basket of fruit. Oranges, figs, nuts, apples and also a few bottles of preserves. Silently and swiftly the four of them climbed into the basket and hid themselves deep down among the fruit and the bottles.

They heard the well-known voice of the shop owner saying: "But I promised that we would deliver it tonight."

A whimpering boy's voice answered: "But I wanted to play outside for a bit."

"You may, Jan," said his mother. "Only first take this basket to the hospital, it's quite near. You must go to the children's hospital, second floor, number six."

"Can't I do it tomorrow?" whimpered Jan.

"No," said his mother firmly. "You just do it now."

"Look at the cat, Mother. Doesn't he look odd?" said Jan, no longer in a whining but an astonished voice.

"The cat?" said the mother, and she stopped, clearly puzzled. She and Jan went towards the cat.

Wiplala pushed his head forward between two apples and stretched out his little hands. The next moment they heard Jan say: "How very odd, would you believe it, Mummy? I felt the cat's back and it was as if he was made of stone. Yet now he's quite normal again. I must have imagined it. Will you catch lots of mice, pussy?"

"Miaow," said the cat, and moved sniffing towards the basket.

"Come on, hurry up now!" said the mother to her boy. And Jan picked up the basket and walked out of the shop with it.

Inside the basket they laughed quite softly. Clever

Wiplala! In the nick of time he had pixilated the cat back again! Well, in any case they were now out of the shop. But were they going to a hospital? That meant a new danger. New fears! There they went. They felt how very carefully the boy was carrying them along the street. For them it was pitch dark. They did not see a thing. They sat quite still, hidden away under the fruit.

"We are going to a hospital," whispered Mr. Blom.

"Then they will discover us," said Nelly Delly plaintively.

Johannes said nothing. He was still very upset after his bath in the gherkin barrel.

Wiplala was also silent. He held on to a banana and looked very angry, he frowned and clenched his fists. He was determined to defend himself, if need be.

They heard the boy talking to the porter of the hospital and they felt the basket being carried upstairs. Then after a short pause they heard a girl's voice saying: "Is that for me? Fruit! Again! And I already have lots of fruit. Well, in any case, thank you!" And she put the basket down near her bed.

She had not noticed anything yet. Inside the basket they sat quite still, they never moved. Perhaps the little sick girl would not unpack the basket immediately. Johannes sat higher up than the others, among the grapes. He peeped very cautiously and saw the child lying in bed. She had a very sweet, pale little face. She was all alone in the room. Perhaps she had broken her leg? Was she very ill? As soon as she falls asleep we can sneak away, thought Johannes.



But the little girl lifted her head from the pillow, and put her nose close to the basket. "Vinegar," she muttered softly. "Vinegar. I smell vinegar. Surely there are no gherkins in a basket of fruit?"

She sniffed and sniffed and Johannes hastily withdrew behind a bunch of grapes. His movement upset a plum and also a pink apple. Mr. Blom cried: "Ouch," because he was caught between a banana and a bottle, Nelly Delly lay upside down, while little Wiplala very nearly tumbled out of the basket.

The sick girl gave a yell and stared at the basket as if she saw a ghost. "W-w-w-w-what is that?" she cried anxiously.

Nelly Delly decided to act at once. She got to her feet, wriggled her way through the fruit and jumped on the bed.

"Don't be frightened," she said. "Please don't be frightened. I am an ordinary little girl, the same as you are, only smaller. No, don't press the bell. Take your hand away from it and don't call anybody!"

The sick girl withdrew her finger from the bell, she had just been going to ring.

"Who are you?" she asked anxiously, but full of curiosity and rather thrilled.

10 *Lotty*

"My name is Nelly Delly. And my father is here too. Look, he is coming out of the basket. And that is my brother Johannes. And that is Wiplala."

"Four little dolls," said the girl, delighted. "Four living dolls." She clapped her hands and looked radiant.

"We are not dolls at all," said Johannes indignantly. "We are ordinary people, and we have only grown so small by accident. What is your name? Are you very ill?"

"My name is Lotty," said the girl. "And I have been ill for three months already. May I show you to the nurse? The night nurse is so nice!"

"No, no!" they all cried, and Mr. Blom began to speak to her very seriously. He jumped on to the pillow and explained: "My dear child, I beg you not to show us to the

nurse or to the doctor or to anybody else. We are not afraid of you because you don't look as if you would do us any harm."

"Of course I won't do you any harm," said Lotty, and she blushed. "What an idea! I am far too pleased at having got you, out of the blue."

"Quite," said Mr. Blom. "But we are frightened of grown-ups. You see, most grown-ups don't understand these things. If they should find us they would make a lot of fuss, and lock us up to exhibit us for money. Or they would examine us 'scientifically'. And so we are frightened of being discovered."

"But how did you get into that basket?" asked Lotty. "And where do you come from? I really thought that you were part of the present. My aunt sent me the basket. Didn't she put you in there?"

"I shall tell you exactly what happened," said Johannes.

"No, I want to," cried Nelly Delly.

And they began to quarrel about who should tell Lotty.

"Wait your turn," said Mr. Blom. "You, Johannes, may start." And so they told Lotty the whole story from the beginning. Lotty sat and listened with beaming eyes and when they had finished the story she took Wiplala in her hands and looked at him for a long time, fascinated.

"Can't you make them bigger again?" she asked him.

Wiplala, as always, looked rather guilty. "No," he said. "I know there is something they have to eat. If I find that I can make them big again. But I have forgotten what it is."

"There is the nurse," whispered Lotty. "Quick, in the drawer of my bedside table." She grabbed Mr. Blom and the others and in less than no time she had stuck them in the drawer near her bed.

While they were sitting in the dark drawer they heard the nurse doing things in the room. They could not see her, of course, but they could hear her talk.

"How flushed you look, my dear," said the nurse. "I will just take your temperature. Did you sleep? Did you dream? Or have you just been getting excited?"

"Yes nurse, no nurse," said Lotty.

"Shall I peel you an orange? Or some other fruit before you go to sleep?"

"Yes, please, nurse. And a peach and a plum and two apples and a few nuts, please."

"What? All that? And as a rule you never want to eat fruit!"

"Oh, but now I want it badly," said Lotty.

"All right. I shall get you a whole plateful."

It was nearly half an hour before the nurse went away. And when she was gone Lotty opened the drawer.

"You can come out now, she is gone," whispered Lotty. "Wait. I shall help you. Look, here is a whole plateful of fruit. Now you can eat as much as you like." She spread her napkin over the bed and soon they all tucked in and had a delicious meal.

"But you ought to eat too," said Mr. Blom. "That is good for you."

"I never have any appetite," sighed Lotty. "Such a
90

nuisance. If only I could eat more I might get better. I have been ill for three months. First I was in a ward with other children, but then the doctor thought it was better for me to be alone in a room!"

"But don't you hate that?" asked Nelly Delly. "And how often do you see your father and mother?"

"Oh, every day. Sometimes twice a day. And they are terribly good to me. Everybody is. Friends and cousins and aunts come at visiting hours, and they tell me all the news and they bring toys and sweets, so I am terribly spoiled really."

Lotty looked very sad as she told all this.

"But you are longing to go home, aren't you?" asked Johannes.

"Yes, and also to go to school and to the swimming pool. And to play all the usual games in the street and have my skipping rope. You know, I would love to walk over a bridge again and spit in the water. Do you think that is silly?"

"Not at all, I quite understand," said Nelly Delly. "I understand it better now that I am no longer an ordinary child. I long to be just plain silly with my girl friends and to trail along the streets arm in arm, the lot of us, and shriek with laughter. We are refugees now and we have the feeling that the whole world is after us."

"You must stay here," said Lotty. "As long as there is nobody in the room we can have a wonderful time, the five of us. We can tell each other stories and play games and have our meals together. Look, I am also having an orange." And Lotty began to eat her fruit with relish.

"And as soon as anybody comes in," she went on, "as soon as I hear footsteps in the passage, and I always hear them immediately, then I will shove you in my drawer. Nobody ever looks in that drawer. That drawer is the only thing that is mine here, and nobody is allowed to look inside."

"Stay here!" muttered Mr. Blom.

"Yes, of course," said Johannes. "Let's stay here. Now that Lotty protects us we surely needn't be afraid. We have food here, isn't that so, Lotty? May we eat some of your food?"

"You may eat my food," laughed Lotty. "As much as you like, and I shall undress and dress you and tuck you in my bed."

And she picked up Mr. Blom and started to undress him.

"No, no you don't! Leave me alone!" he cried. "I can undress myself. The idea!"

Lotty roared with laughter and suddenly looked much better.

"All right," she said. "But will you stay with me?"

"For the time being," said Mr. Blom.

"Perhaps Wiplala can make me better," said Lotty. "You can do magic, can't you?" She picked up Wiplala and held him close to her face. He looked at her seriously.

"I can't make sick people better," he said rather sadly. "I can do a little magic. We call it pixilating, but I can't pixilate so *very* well."

"Where shall we sleep?" asked Johannes. "Oh Lotty, may we sleep at the foot of your bed? There is a funny little long

pillow, the four of us could put our heads on that. What a lovely bed!"

And so the entire Blom family stayed with Lotty in the hospital. They slept in her bed, neatly tucked in at its foot. They ate her food, they sang songs for her, they played tag all over the bed, and they had all sorts of games. But as soon as anyone came in, they hid themselves in the drawer that nobody ever looked into. Sometimes they were so absorbed in a game that they never heard the footsteps in the passage. Then they were startled by the noise of the doorknob and helter-skelter . . . off they went like so many grasshoppers. For they became very expert at sneaking away quickly.

Visiting hours were an awful nuisance. Then they had to sit in the drawer for so long, so terribly long, and in the dark without saying a word. After it had happened a couple of times Lotty said: "I shall leave the drawer ajar, then you can hear everything and, now and then, you can see something."

From then on they could peep out when it was visiting hour, so they saw Lotty's father and mother, and sometimes her friends and cousins. Once a naughty cousin stretched out his hand to the drawer: "What's that in there?" he asked.

But Lotty slapped his fingers hard and shouted: "Keep your hands off!"

"As if I was going to steal your things," grumbled the boy, turning red.

"It's my drawer," sobbed Lotty. "And *nobody* may look inside it."

"All right darling," said her mother, who happened to be there, and who wanted to pacify her. "I can quite understand that there must be *one* little nook that is your own entirely, which nobody should look inside."

The Blom family trembled and shivered in the drawer. They were always relieved when visiting hours were over. Gradually they got to know the voices of the nurses, the visitors and the doctor. Doctor Vink had a very nice voice. Once they heard him say: "Excellent, the way you are eating lately. I have the feeling that something has happened that suddenly made you feel much better. And that is the reason why you started to eat!"

They were all terribly happy about that. Because it was Mr. Blom who got Lotty to eat properly. He told her stories while she was having her meals, wonderful long stories, and then without noticing it herself she simply finished her plate.

11

The Doctor

Lotty lay with her hands under her head in her little white bed, in the cool white room of the hospital.

“Yes, I do feel better,” she said. “Lots and lots better.”

“Shall I tell you something? In ten days time you may go home,” said Doctor Vink. “Now, isn’t that wonderful?”

“Go home?” said Lotty, startled.

“Yes, home. You are no longer a sick girl. Won’t it be grand to go home?”

“I don’t want to go home,” said Lotty, sitting up in bed and looking frightened.

The doctor looked at her silently for quite a time and then he said: “Would you mind telling me what the matter is? Why are you scared? Who are you frightened of? Do tell me.”

Lotty shook her head. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Well," said Doctor Vink. "We have always been very good friends and I think you might tell me what worries you. But you mustn't think that I shall be cross if you don't. I won't be cross or disappointed. If people want to have secrets that is quite all right. So if you would rather not, don't tell me anything."

Lotty plucked at the white counterpane on her bed.

"I only thought, maybe I could help you," said Doctor Vink.

"If I tell you my secret, Doc," said Lotty. "Then will you . . . *do nothing?*"

"I shall listen very carefully," said the doctor. "And if I listen carefully I shall also understand. And if I really understand you need not be frightened of me."

"Well then," said Lotty with a deep sigh. "Here goes. Hold tight Doc. I have friends who are in difficulties."

The doctor listened in silence.

"There is a father and two children, a boy and a girl. And also a friend of the children. Four in all."

"Do they ever come here at visiting hour? I have never seen them."

"No, they never come at visiting hour," said Lotty. "They are here when there is nobody else, no nurse, no doctor, nobody."

"But," said Doctor Vink, baffled. "How . . . how do they come in? Through the window?"

"They needn't come in. They are here all the time," whispered Lotty.

"All the time?" The doctor looked around him and then stared at Lotty.

"You think I've got a temperature," laughed Lotty. "You think that I am delirious. I'll explain: Look, the father is Mr. Blom. He is very learned, he writes books. And he lived in a house with his two children somewhere in town. One day a little friend came to them. He wasn't an ordinary friend, no. He was so big!" And Lotty showed his size with her finger and thumb. "And that little friend was called Wiplala. And he stayed with them and they are very fond of him. But you see, Doc, this Wiplala can do a little magic. He calls it pixilating. He can do it just a little and that is rather a nuisance. If he could do it really well they would not be in such a fix. But sometimes he can and sometimes he can't."

Lotty was silent for a moment and looked stealthily at the doctor. To her great relief she saw that he neither looked sarcastic nor terribly worried. No, he listened as if he were interested.

"One day," continued Lotty, "they went, the four of them, to a restaurant. But when they had finished their meal Mr. Blom could not pay, he didn't have enough money. So they were locked up and the police were fetched. And then little Wiplala made the others as small as he was himself, so they could easily escape. Since then they are no bigger than mice."

She looked at the doctor, but he did not say a word and waited for the rest of the story.

"They have wandered all over the place," said Lotty.

"They had to be careful that human beings did not find them. For people *can* be horrid."

The doctor nodded.

"And in the end they landed by accident in a basket of fruit. I got that basket as a present here in bed. I found them and they have become my friends. They have been in my room here for weeks now. And we have had lots of fun together."

Lotty looked suddenly radiant.

The doctor leaned towards her and said: "And so that is why you got better! You were unhappy all the time, you were homesick, you were bored. But now . . . I say, where are they?"

Lotty ignored the last question.

"They are very good to me," she said. "If there is nobody in the room, they sit on my bed. They share all my food and we play the craziest games. At night they sleep at the foot of my bed. And when Nurse Christine comes in, or somebody else, then they hide themselves as quick as lightning. Once when nurse came to take my temperature, they were still sitting on the bed. Then they crawled under the mattress and they were nearly suffocated. It's a bit of a worry, to be so secretive. Also they are not completely happy here, Doctor. They are sad because they must remain small and they can't go back to their own house."

"Why can't they go home?" asked Doctor Vink.

"Because they were discovered there, by the cleaning woman and her husband. They don't feel safe there. They don't feel safe anywhere now. Only here, with me, because

I look after them. You know, Doc, I always try to cheer them up and comfort them. And I often manage to do that. I believe that that is what made me so much better. If you have to try to cheer up other people that does you a lot more good than when people try to cheer you up. Do you see what I mean, Dockey?"

"Yes, I do," said Doctor Vink pensively. "That is true, of course."

"Well," said Lotty. "We would have stuck it out for weeks, for fear of something worse, but now Johannes is ill."

"Oh dear, is that the little boy?"

"Yes, that's the boy. And so I said, I'd tell the doctor. They didn't want me to but at last they agreed. Will you promise not to do a thing, and not to tell anybody?"

"I promise," said the doctor solemnly.

"Here they are," said Lotty.

She drew towards her a large chocolate box that lay at the foot of her bed. It was an enormous box, there must have been pounds of chocolates in it. A cardboard box with blue and pink flowers. She opened the box and there they lay all neatly in a row, Mr. Blom, Nelly Delly, Johannes and Wiplala.

They lay in tin foil and Johannes had a bit of cotton wool on top of him. Wiplala growled and showed his sharp little teeth. He was scared. The others smiled and Mr. Blom got to his feet first, came out of the box, stretched out his hand and said: "How do you do, Doctor?"

"Very well, thank you," said Doctor Vink, and he shook the little hand that was offered. Then Nelly Delly and

Wiplala came out of the box. Johannes stayed where he was. His face looked flushed and feverish and he pulled the cotton wool all over himself.

"So now I have got yet another little patient in this room," said Doctor Vink. "The smallest patient I have ever had. I'll just examine you, little man. Take off that pullover and your shirt too."

With deft fingers the doctor examined little Johannes. He looked at his tiny tongue, felt his minute pulse and looked into his throat with a magnifying glass.

"A mild tonsilitis," he declared. "I shall give you some very small pills and you must stay under the blankets, I mean under the cotton wool."

"Well," said Mr. Blom. "It is quite a relief to me that at last you know about us, Doctor. What are you going to do now?"

"Nothing," said the doctor. "I promised Lotty that I would do *nothing* at all. You may say for yourself if I can help you."

"Look here," said Mr. Blom. "The only thing we want is to grow big again. And you can't make us bigger, can you? Only Wiplala can do that, if only he would remember how!"

Wiplala looked rather diffidently and nervously at the doctor. "Some day I can do it perhaps," he said. "There is some stuff they have to swallow, but I have forgotten the name."

"For the time being they must stay here, Doc." said Lotty,

"All right," said the doctor. "Until you go home, Lotty. But on one condition. I must tell Nurse Teena."

They were all silent and looked doubtful.

"I find that absolutely necessary," said the doctor. "I shall call her."

But there was no need. They heard footsteps in the passage. Mr. Blom got ready to run away but the doctor stopped him. "Don't worry," he said. "I shall arrange it all."

When the nurse came in Doctor Vink said: "Nurse Teena, do come here."

Nurse Teena was elderly. She was fat, quiet and strict. The doctor took her by the chin and looked straight into her eyes. She did not have a chance to look at the bed.

"Nurse," said Doctor Vink. "I want to introduce you to some friends of mine and of Lotty. Promise that you won't give a yell."

"I promise," said the nurse calmly.

"Then you may look," said the doctor. And he let her chin go.

Nurse Teena looked at the bed. She did not yell. She did not faint. She said quite quietly: "Hello."

"Good day, nurse," they said.

"I knew it," said Nurse Teena.

"That's not true," cried Lotty. "You couldn't know!"

"Once when I came in I saw some little creatures running away and sneaking into your drawer. And so I thought: Well, if I am not supposed to see something, then I haven't seen it. I don't like being inquisitive."



“Oh nurse, you are an angel!” said Lotty. “And now you may watch Nelly Delly using my plait as a skipping-rope.”

She took her long dark plait and turned it. And Nelly Delly jumped in and out. They all laughed.

“Nurse, you have got an extra patient,” said the doctor. “Here in this box. Would you give him a thimbleful of orange juice?”

Nurse Teena smiled and said: “I am very glad that we have no more secrets now. We shall have a lovely time together!”

12

The Thief

“Come, come,” said Doctor Vink. “This isn’t a parting for ever and ever? Why be so sad?”

On Lotty’s bed stood Mr. Blom with tears in his eyes. Next to him stood Nelly Delly, Johannes and Wiplala, and cried their hearts out. And Lotty herself lay there sobbing, her pillow was soaked.

“Look here,” said Doctor Vink. “There is absolutely no reason to be sad, Lotty. You are better now and you are going home tomorrow. Is that nice or isn’t it?”

“Ye-es,” sobbed Lotty.

“I should think so,” said the doctor. “And Johannes is better too and you are all going with me in the car, in my nice new leather case, and I shall take you to a very pleasant house, in the country, where a charming old lady lives, who

will love you all, and where you will be safe. Now is that a good plan or not?"

"Yes," nodded Mr. Blom and Nelly Delly and Johannes. Only Wiplala looked a bit suspicious.

"Let's be off then," said Doctor Vink.

Lotty picked up her little friends once more, one by one, and kissed them.

"Come and see us soon," said Nelly Delly.

"Look after yourself and eat properly," said Mr. Blom.

"Thank you for everything," said Johannes, and with his small hand he gently stroked Lotty's nose.

"So long," said Wiplala.

And then they crept into the doctor's case. The four of them easily fitted in the outside pocket that was closed with a zipper.

"But I shall leave the zipper undone," said the doctor. "Otherwise you will suffocate. Mind you don't poke your heads over the rim, people might see you."

They waved to Lotty for the last time when the doctor went through the door, and then they quickly dived into the outside pocket of the case. Dr. Vink walked through the passage, greeted the porter outside, went to his car and put the bag next to him on the seat.

"All right," he said. "You may have a peep now; it is so long ago since you saw the world outside."

They stuck their heads out of the bag and looked. It was astonishing to see the town again, with all those high houses, all the cars, all the people in the street—but it was terribly



noisy. They were not used to it any more, in the sick room it had been so quiet.

"Look here, I have to see one patient for a moment on the way," said Doctor Vink. "I hope you won't mind. I shall park here along the canal and I shall be back in ten minutes. You had better stay in the bag; someone might look into the car."

They stayed quietly in the bag and discussed what their new home would be like.

"I am very curious to know what that old lady will be like," said Nelly Delly.

"Yes," said Mr. Blom. "And I ask myself if we shall be really free, in that house, to go where we like. Do you think she will lock us up?"

"Then we'll give her the slip," said Johannes.

While they were talking together, very softly, there came sauntering along the canal a man called Rikus Rel. Now Rikus Rel was not a very nice man. In fact he was definitely nasty, for whenever he had a chance he stole. He wasn't really a professional burglar, but in a big department store he would cleverly snatch some of the goods on display, in a café he sometimes took a lady's purse, and at the railway station he had frequently grabbed a small suitcase. Yes,

wherever he saw an easy and comfortable way to rob anyone, he did it.

Now he happened to see the doctor park his car along the canal and walk away in a hurry without locking the car door.

No harm in having a closer look, thought Rikus Rel, and stealthily moved up to the door. He turned the handle, opened the door, snatched the bag from the front seat and then walked slowly away. Very slowly, without any sign of hurry, so as not to rouse suspicion.

The four little people in the bag felt that someone had picked them up. They were astonished that the doctor was back already, for they never doubted for a moment that it was the doctor who had taken the bag and was walking with it in his hand.

Simultaneously they all stuck their heads out of the bag and cried with one voice: "Hi, have you come back already?"

Rikus Rel suddenly stopped, he stood stock still. He had nabbed a bag and the bag *talked*. There were voices coming out of it. Tiny voices, true, but real human voices. He thought for a moment: I am sure there must be a small radio in the bag. He looked at it, noticed the outside pocket and saw four very small heads looking at him in amazement.

Rikus Rel was a coward. He was easily frightened and superstitious. He thought the bag was bewitched and he became terrified. Without further thought he lifted that fiendish bag of tricks high in the air and hurled it into the canal as far away as he could. For a few moments those



inside it felt they were floating in the air. Then the bag dropped in the canal with a splash and immediately their eyes and noses were full of water. Water poured inside.

Mr. Blom never remembered how he got out of the bag; he only knew that he was swimming and that he saw Nelly Delly swimming by his side.

"Where is Johannes?" he shouted.

"Here, Daddy," and the head of Johannes appeared on the surface.

"And where is Wiplala?" While swimming they looked around, but they did not see him anywhere.

"Wiplala! Wiplala!" cried Nelly Delly anxiously. "Oh Wiplala, where are you?" No answer.

"He will drown," wailed Johannes. "He can't swim!"

"Perhaps he is still in the bag," said Mr. Blom, and he swam back as fast as he could to the bag, which was only just afloat.

They saw Wiplala's little arm sticking out of the pocket, and together they pulled him out. Half unconscious he let himself be dragged through the water. They kept his head up and swam with him through the canal till he opened his eyes and said: "Perhaps there is a duck somewhere near."

"There is a duck, Wiplala," said Johannes. "We shall swim towards him."

They made very slow progress because they were so small, but at last they reached a large drake with gleaming greenish blue feathers.

Wiplala at once began to talk in a quacking sort of way.

He knew ducks' language and the drake listened seriously and was not at all unfriendly.

"He says that he will take us to the waterside," said Wiplala. "You climb on his back."

Fortunately it was evening, and passers-by never looked down the steep bank of the canal to see four small live dolls climbing onto the back of a duck, who then in a stately and leisurely manner paddled them through the water.

"The duck says he knows a stairway where one can reach the top of the embankment," said Wiplala.

"He had better take us there," said Mr. Blom. "We must try and reach dry land."

The duck swam underneath several bridges, now and then he stuck his head under water, hunting with his bill for something to eat, or said something to Wiplala in quack language, and finally paddled to the waterside. Here at the duck's landing stage was a steep little iron ladder ten steps high.

"Quack," said Wiplala to the drake.

"Quack," said the drake, and that was probably as much as to say: "You are welcome!"

One by one they climbed from the duck's back on to the stairs. They thanked the drake warmly and began to climb. The drake shook his feathers and swam away sedately.

There they were, standing under the trees of a deserted Amsterdam canal street, in the dark. It was late in the evening now. They were cold and wet.

"And now perhaps Doctor Vink believes that we have run away from the car," said Nelly Delly disconsolately.

"Of course he won't," said Mr. Blom. "He quite understands that we could never carry that heavy case, not even the four of us. I am sure he understood immediately that the bag had been stolen."

"He will be very worried," said Johannes.

"I am certain he won't dare tell Lotty," said Wiplala.

"That's why we ought to try to ring up the doctor," said Mr. Blom.

"Ring up? But where can we do that?"

"In a house."

"Must we go to a house and ask if we may use the telephone?"

"No. But we must sneak into a house. And when the people who live there have gone to bed, we must ring up."

"This house then," said Nelly Delly, pointing to one in front of them. "This is a nice one. They are sure to have a telephone."

In the basement of the house there was a barred window. They found it quite easy to climb in through the bars and at once they found themselves in a large comfortable kitchen. There was nobody there. It was beautifully warm, for the kitchen stove was lit and on it a big kettle was singing.

Behind the stove lay a pile of firewood. They took off their clothes and put them to dry on the wood, while they did some exercises to get warm.

"Well," sighed Mr. Blom. "A new home. I wonder what is in store for us?"

13

The Watch

In the old house on the canal lived two ladies. Two old ladies: Miss Adele and Miss Louise. They were very genteel, very orderly and very strict, and they were very old-fashioned in their ideas.

Now they were sitting opposite each other at a mahogany table in their nice big drawing-room, and facing them stood Klaasje.

Klaasje was their servant. She was still very young, had come up from the country and was really frightened of the two stern ladies dressed in black.

"Klaasje," said Miss Adele. "Klaasje, this morning my watch lay on that little antique walnut cupboard. Now it is gone. How did that happen?"

"I don't know, madam," stuttered Klaasje. "I haven't seen no watch."

"Nobody has been in the room except ourselves and *you*," said Miss Adele. "Somebody must have taken that watch. Did you take that watch?"

"No, madam," said Klaasje, and she began to cry. "I really haven't seen no watch. And I never take nothing!"

Now the other lady, Miss Louise, joined in. "Klaasje," she said. "You have now been with us for six months and we think you have done your work fairly well. It is a pity that this has happened. This proves that you are not an honest girl."

"But I am an honest girl," cried Klaasje. "I have never stolen nothing."

"Then who has taken that watch?" said Miss Louise icily. "Somebody must have."

"Are you going to fetch the police?" sobbed Klaasje.

"No, that we wouldn't do," said Miss Adele. "And we shall not sack you either, at least not just now, because it is very difficult to get domestic help at present. So we shall give you another chance, Klaasje."

"But I think it is terrible that you suspect me," said Klaasje with a trembling voice.

"Quite. We don't like it either, and you understand that from today onwards we shall keep an eye on you all the time," snapped Miss Louise. "And now you had better come upstairs with us. You must help us put the sewing machine back where it belongs."

The two ladies left the room in a stately fashion and

Klaasje hobbled after them, still sobbing, with a crumpled wet handkerchief in her fist. The drawing-room was now empty and quiet.

Empty? No, not quite. Under the piano sat four tiny little people, the Blom family and Wiplala. They had just achieved a very difficult trip: half an hour ago they had climbed upstairs from the basement. And that wasn't a simple matter for such small fellows. Very cautiously and softly, without anybody noticing them, they had reached the drawing-room door, had slipped through a chink and crawled under the piano that stood near the door.

They emerged when the ladies and Klaasje left the room.

"Did you hear that?" said Nelly Delly indignantly. "I don't think those people are at all nice. Did you hear what they said to that girl, Klaasje? I don't believe she has stolen that watch, do you?"

"No," said Mr. Blom. "I don't believe it either. You are right, Nelly Delly, those ladies are not at all nice. We must be careful that they don't catch us. But have you seen a telephone?"

"Yes," cried Johannes. "There is one on that low table."

"Quick then," said Mr. Blom. "Perhaps they will soon be back again, before we have had time to telephone."

In an instant they had all clambered up the low table and there they stood next to the telephone. But it wasn't as easy as all that. First they had to look up the number in the telephone directory.

"We must have the V for Vink," said Mr. Blom. "I am sure Doctor Vink will be in during the evening. We shall



ring up his home address and ask if he will come and fetch us away from here as soon as possible. Do help me, I can't open that fat directory by myself."

With a combined effort they managed to open the book at the V.

"Here we are," said Mr. Blom. "Here I have got Veenstra, Veerman, Velthuis—a few more pages . . . be quick . . . we are losing too much time. Ha, here it is: Dr. P. J. Vink. And now we must lift the receiver, all four of us. Up! It is very heavy. There we are!" The receiver was off.

"Now we must dial the number, all of us," said Mr. Blom. "Each time we will have to pull at the disc together.

There we go!" Goodness me, that was heavy work, very difficult. At last they had turned all the numbers and Mr. Blom sat down near the mouthpiece while the children listened at the other end of the receiver.

"Hello," shouted Mr. Blom, as loudly as he could. "Doctor Vink? Hello, Doctor Vink!"

"Vink speaking," they heard.

"Doctor Vink, this is the Bloms speaking. We were stolen, bag and all! And now we are at the Roer Canal, in a house, with two ladies, their name is . . ." Mr. Blom looked round and said: "Dash it, we don't even know their name!"

"Zoetekaas!" cried Johannes. "They are called Zoetekaas. I can see it here on their address book."

"I see. Are you there, Doctor Vink? 'The ladies Zoetekaas at the Roer Canal, that's where we are."

The doctor at the other end of the line was first speechless for a moment. Then he suddenly grasped everything and cried: "What did you say? Zoetekaas on the Roer Canal? I will come and fetch you. But where can I find you? I can't just barge into their living-room? How can I. . . ."

At that moment Wiplala called out: "Run! Run! There is somebody coming."

They left the telephone receiver lying on the table and slithered swiftly down the table-cloth. Just in time they found a safe hiding place under the antique walnut cupboard.

Miss Adele came into the room, took something out of her silk satchel that was hanging on a chair and was just going away when her eye caught the telephone.

"How odd, the receiver is off the bracket," she murmured. "How can that possibly have happened, a moment ago it was on." She went to the telephone and put back the receiver. Then she left the room.

"She has gone," whispered Mr. Blom. "Shall we try again? No, I really think it is unnecessary. Doctor Vink understood, I am sure he will come, tonight even. We must quietly stay here, under this cupboard."

"I do hope Doctor Vink will come soon," said Nelly Delly with a sigh. "I don't feel at ease in this house. What are you doing, Wiplala?"

They looked at Wiplala who was lying on his tummy under the cupboard, quite close to the wall, and was pulling at something for all he was worth. They looked closer and saw that he was tugging at a shining ribbon that stuck out of a narrow gap.

"Gold," said Nelly Delly. "Oh, I see what it is, the bracelet of a wrist watch. That watch is lying in the gap between the wall and the carpet." They helped Wiplala and a moment later they were holding the watch in their arms.

"Now you see," said Mr. Blom. "Sometimes there are advantages in being so small. You know what we shall do? We shall put it in Miss Adele's satchel. There on the chair."

They dragged the watch to the chair and clambered up. They put the watch in the satchel and slid hastily back to their hiding-place again under the walnut cupboard. Just as they sat down the ladies and Klaasje came in again.

"Would you like a little eau de cologne, Louise?" asked Miss Adele.

"Thank you, Adele," said Miss Louise.

Miss Adele took her satchel and looked for her little bottle of eau de cologne. Suddenly her eyes were wide with amazement and her mouth fell open.

"What is the matter?" cried Miss Louise.

Miss Adele took the gold watch out of her satchel and held it up.

"In my satchel!" she gasped. "How can that possibly have happened?"

"Oh good," cried Klaasje. "You found it. Now you see for yourself that I didn't steal it!"

"I must say, Adele, that I find this extremely careless and negligent on your part," said Miss Louise. "Of course the watch was in your bag all the time!"

Miss Adele looked down her nose.

And under the antique walnut cupboard sat Mr. Blom and Nelly Delly and grinned at Wiplala and Johannes.

14

Doctor Vink Arrives

"How long have we been sitting here under the cupboard by now?" asked Johannes, and he yawned.

"Don't talk so loudly," whispered Mr. Blom. "If the ladies hear they will come and look for us."

"Would Doctor Vink still come tonight?" asked Nelly Delly softly. "And when everybody is in bed will he force his way in like a burglar?"

"That's the front door bell, I think," whispered Mr. Blom. "Just listen!"

They listened. They heard Klaasje walking in the passage, on her way to open the front door. A moment later someone knocked on the drawing-room door and Klaasje's head appeared: "There is a gentleman," she said. "A gentleman who wishes to speak to you."

"A gentleman?" asked Miss Adele. "What kind of a gentleman, Klaasje? Didn't you ask his name?"

"It's a doctor," said Klaasje. "Doctor Vink, and he would like to speak to you for a moment, he says."

"Well, let Doctor Vink come in," said Miss Louise.

Klaasje withdrew and Doctor Vink marched into the room.

Underneath the walnut cupboard they held their breath. There he was, dear old Doctor Vink. He had come to fetch them. He had done what he promised, and had not left them in the lurch. They would have loved to run to him and call out: "Doctor dear, here we are, pick us up quickly and take us with you!" But they realized that this would be very unwise and that they had better wait for the time being.

"Please sit down, Doctor," said Miss Louise, very solemnly and rather stiffly.

"Thank you," said Doctor Vink, and he sat down on one of the plush-covered chairs.

He put his leather case next to the chair. The little creatures under the cupboard watched him breathlessly, they saw it was a brand new case. Again it was a case with an outside pocket, and the pocket was wide open. Wide open! The case stood a few yards from the cupboard. If they now came out and rushed towards it, they could easily jump inside and hide. But how could they run two yards through the room without being seen? The two ladies would certainly spot them. No, they had better wait a little longer. But there was no doubt that Doctor Vink had put his bag there on purpose.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Doctor?" said Miss Adele.

"No thank you . . . very kind of you, no thank you . . ." said Doctor Vink.

"May we perhaps hear the reason for your visit?" asked Miss Louise, polite, but rather chilly.

"Yes, eh . . ." began Doctor Vink. He was visibly embarrassed and blushed and stammered a bit. "You see, I passed your house and I took the liberty of looking inside, because I am so interested in old canal houses."

"Yes, and . . . ?" asked Miss Louise.

"Then I saw your wonderful antique chandelier," continued the doctor. "I don't remember ever having seen such a beautiful chandelier. You may think it very forward of me, but I rang the bell to ask you if I might have a closer look at the chandelier."

Miss Louise and Miss Adele beamed with pleasure. They were very fond of their nice old furniture and were delighted that a stranger, a doctor at that, was interested in their chandelier.

"But of course," they said with one voice. "Of course, Doctor, do have a good look." Doctor Vink leaned backwards in his chair and looked up at the brass chandelier. The ladies, smiling proudly, did the same!

Mr. Blom, under the cupboard, immediately realized that Doctor Vink had invented this story about the chandelier in order that everybody should look upwards. He tugged at Nelly Delly's arm and called out: "Johannes, Wiplala, come on," and then they rushed into the room. They raced to the



bag, dived into the outside pocket and there they sat panting and puffing.

Doctor Vink looked away from the chandelier and bent down to pick up his bag. He carefully closed the zip fastener and said: "I can hardly expect you to sell me the chandelier, am I right, ladies?"

"Never, never, indeed!" said Miss Louise. "That chandelier belonged to our grandfather."

Doctor Vink sighed. "Then I shall no longer abuse your hospitality," he said.

"Are you sure you would not like a cup of tea, or an eggnog?"

"No, thank you. I am sorry but I must be off. I really very much appreciate your allowing me to see this magnificent piece from close to."

He bowed and took his bag more firmly under his arm.

"Klaasje, will you see the doctor out?"

Klaasje opened the door for Doctor Vink. The heavy front door closed with a bang and he stood on the top of the flight of stone steps that, as in all canal houses in Amsterdam, lead to the pavement. He stood still in the dark, opened the outside pocket and said: "Well, wasn't that splendid? And how did you like my story about the chandelier? Now you are coming with me and I shall take you to your new home. And I shall take jolly good care that the bag isn't stolen again." The doctor chatted happily. In fact he talked so much and was so excited that one could hardly get a word in edgeways, but at last Mr. Blom waved his little arms and cried: "Stop! Doctor! Something awful has happened!"

"What?" said Doctor Vink. "What has happened?"

"Wiplala isn't here," said Mr. Blom. "Wiplala didn't come with us."

"Where the dickens *is* he?" asked Doctor Vink, and he had to sit down on one of the marble steps.

"That we don't know," said Nelly Delly. "When we realized that we could jump into the bag, we did it immediately. And we thought Wiplala came with us, for we were sitting together under the cupboard, and we did call: 'Come on, Wiplala, into the bag.'"

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Doctor Vink. "Well, it can't be helped. Then it is only you who are coming with me."

"Only us? And leave Wiplala in that horrid canal house?" asked Johannes indignantly. "Impossible. Sooner or later those ladies will catch him."

"Oh no, we can't leave Wiplala in the lurch," said Nelly Delly. "We have got to have him, otherwise we won't go with you."

Mr. Blom also shook his head and said sadly: "No, Doctor Vink, we cannot leave Wiplala behind."

"But," said the Doctor desperately, "what is to be done? I cannot possibly ring again and ask if I may see the chandelier for a second time. And that on the off chance that Wiplala will still jump into my bag. I can't do that, I daren't do that."

"No," said Mr. Blom. "That is impossible. There is nothing we can do except go back into the house. We know the way now. Please push us through the kitchen window into the basement."

Doctor Vink was terribly dejected. "This is dreadful," he said. "And I was so happy that I had got you out with such a clever trick. Now it has all been for nothing."

Nelly Delly put her head against his hand. "Please don't be cross with us, Doctor dear," she said. "You wouldn't leave your friend in the lurch, would you now?"

"Of course not," said Doctor Vink. "All right then, I shall put you through the bars of this kitchen window, is that the idea? The kitchen is dark."

He put them one by one through the window on to the window sill of the kitchen.

"Shall I wait for you here?" he whispered.

"No, Doctor," said Mr. Blom. "That would take too long. But could you come and look for us again tomorrow morning. Would you do that?"

"All right then, tomorrow morning early," said the doctor. "Very early before surgery hour. I shall manage to find yet another excuse to be let in. Good-bye, my dear children."

"Good-bye, Doctor dear, a thousand thanks!" said the little Bloms, on the brink of tears. They tried to find their way through the dark kitchen in the direction of the staircase. They were going to look for Wiplala.

15 *Ghosts*

It was in the middle of the night, about three o'clock, and in the drawing-room the light was on. Two ladies stood in the middle of the room, their arms round each other's shoulders. They shivered and looked at each other in despair.

And Klaasje, also in her nightdress, stood near them and looked very scared.

"But what precisely did you see, Louise?" asked Miss Adele.

"I saw . . . I saw a tiny little man, hopping about on the keys of the typewriter!" cried Miss Louise. "That's what I saw."

"But, but that's nonsense," stammered her sister. "How could you? Little men, I mean gnomes, don't exist. You must have dreamed it."

"But didn't you also hear the typewriter? In the middle of the night? You also heard someone playing the piano, didn't you? In an empty room! Didn't we both hear it?"

"Yes," said Miss Adele. "I did hear it. I recognized the tune. Klaasje, did you hear it too?"

"Yes," said Klaasje. "I heard the typewriter and that seemed so strange, so strange. I thought there were burglars. Then I went to have a look in the room, very quietly, I heard the piano and I heard the typewriter, but I did not see a thing—the room was empty."

"And then we came and switched on the light," said Miss Adele. "And as soon as I turned on the light I saw the little man, as small as that!" She showed the size with her thumb and finger. "As small as that he was."

"Ghosts," said Miss Louise. "Our house is haunted. We must do something. Ring up the fire brigade or the police!"

"But what can the fire brigade or the police do about it, Louise? Surely they can't do anything with ghosts?"

"Then who should we get to cope with ghosts?" asked Miss Louise nervously. "Who ought you to ring up when you are troubled with ghosts? Is there a Central Ghost Service or something?"

"Let's look at the typewriter," said Miss Adele. "Perhaps they have typed something on that paper."

They all went to the typewriter that stood on the little bureau. A sheet of paper had been put into the typewriter. By whom? When? and how? Nobody ever used the typewriter. There had not been a sheet of paper in it. Now there was, and on it someone had typed: 'Wiplalawhereareyou.'

"We ought to search the entire room," sighed Miss Louise. "The entire house. Here, I shall start with the waste basket."

"But my dear Louise," said Miss Adele. "You won't find ghosts in waste baskets! And if they were there you wouldn't see them. Because ghosts are invisible and transparent."

"But what about that little man?" said Miss Louise. "The one I saw with my own eyes. He might be in the waste basket."

She turned over the basket but only a few bits of crumpled paper fell out.

"Perhaps it was mice," said Klaasje humbly.

"Mice," said Miss Adele. "Have you ever heard a mouse play the piano, Klaasje? And have you ever seen a mouse typing a letter on the typewriter?"

"No, miss," said Klaasje obediently.

"Well then, don't say such stupid things."

The two ladies went through the room. They lifted cushions off the couch, looked underneath cupboards and chairs, pulled out the drawers of the bureau and looked everywhere, but in the end they had to give up their search.

Miss Louise sat down on a chair and began to cry. "Ghosts and horrible creatures in this house. Who would have thought it? Trolls and witches and cruel elves in our house. A respectable house on a nice canal!"

"I have an idea, Louisc," said Miss Adele suddenly. "What if we rang up that nice Doctor Vink?"

"Doctor Vink?"



"Yes, the doctor who was here this evening to look at the chandelier."

"But why? We are not ill. And what can he do about it if we have ghosts?"

"Well, I merely thought, doctors are usually very helpful. And it gives me a safe feeling to have a man in the house."

"But do you want to ring him up now? In the middle of the night? At three o'clock?"

"Why not? He is a doctor, isn't he? Doctors are used to being woken up by the telephone."

"All right then," said Miss Louise. "You ring him up."

Miss Adele went to the telephone. "Look at that now," she said. "The telephone directory happens to lie open at the name of Doctor Vink. That is a kind of indication. We shall ask if he will come immediately." She dialled the number and waited.

"Oh, hello, are you there, Doctor Vink? You are speaking to the Misses Zoetekaas on the Roer Canal. Yes, you were with us last night and now we are in awful trouble, and we wanted to ask you if you would come *immediately*. No, we are not ill. We have Other Problems, Doctor. Oh, thank you, thank you! We look forward to seeing you."

"He is coming," she said with a sigh. "He is an exceptionally nice man. He will be here in an hour's time."

"Good," said Miss Louise. "Then we had better stay here, close together, in the drawing-room. Klaasje, take a chair and sit with us. And keep a good look out, you might see something."

At that same moment Mr. Blom, Nelly Delly and Johannes

were hanging in the indoor ivy, midway between the tea-table and the bookcase. They had searched desperately for Wiplala and hadn't found him. At last the three of them sat in an empty sugar bowl on the lower shelf of the tea table. But when the ladies began their search through the entire room, it seemed too risky to stay there and they had climbed up the ivy that hung from a flower pot on the high bookcase.

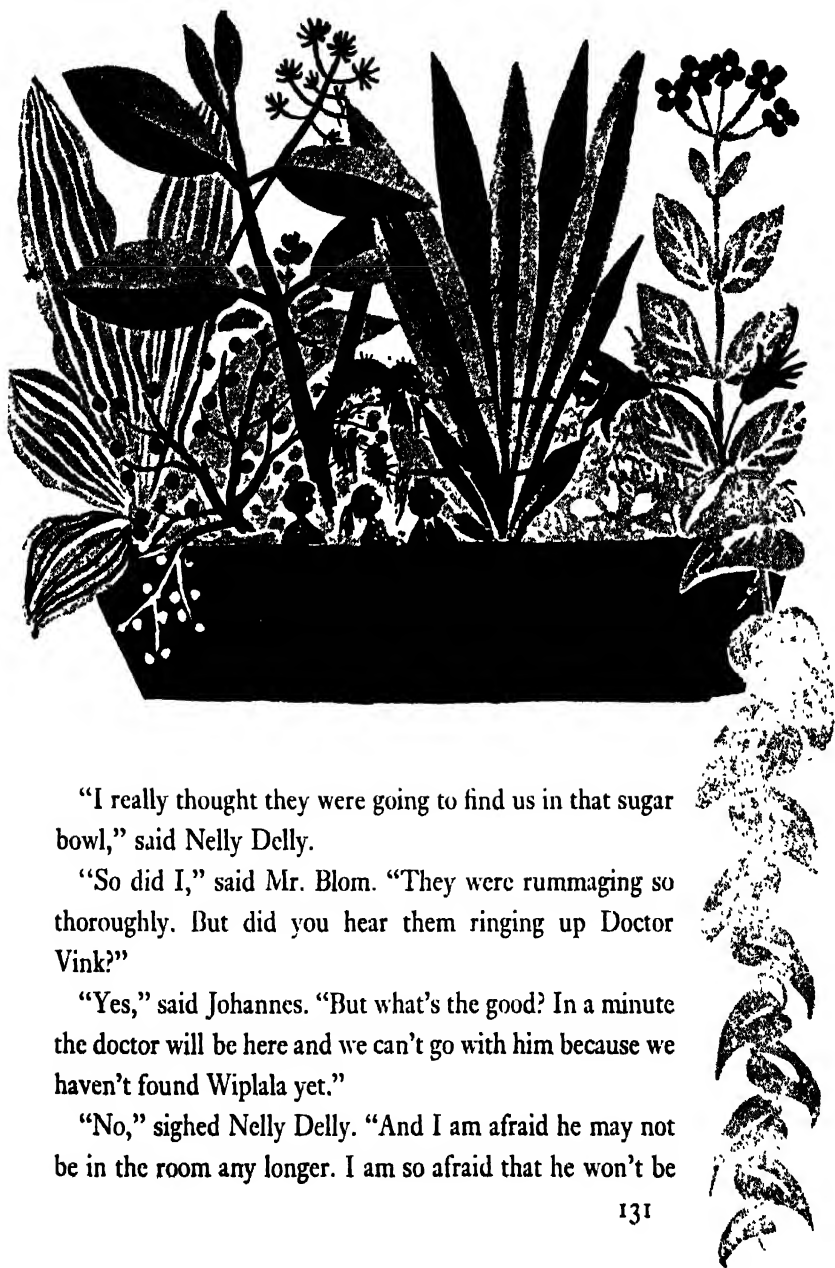
"Come on, you can climb farther," said Johannes very softly. He sat higher up, and moved inch by inch, with his legs round the stem, hidden by the leaves.

Nelly Delly and Mr. Blom followed him. They had to be very careful not to make the stem swing to and fro, and the alarming thing was that the ladies were now on the look out and turned their eyes in all directions. But they could not keep on hanging in that wobbly plant and they dared not go back to the sugar bowl. They had to go higher up. They went very slowly, very cautiously, and quite noiselessly. Thank goodness the plant hung in a dark corner!

It was as if they had climbed for hours, as if that stem were miles long and as if they would never reach the top of the bookcase. But at last Johannes whispered: "I have done it!"

He put his small foot on the top of the bookcase and bent down to help the others straddle the rim. They hoisted themselves up and then climbed into a bowl full of plants that stood on the bookcase. It was a very large bowl, with all sorts of plants: begonias, geranium, cacti, very luxurious ferns—it was as if they had landed in a wood and they felt safely hidden among all that greenery.

Exhausted and panting, all three sat down close together.



"I really thought they were going to find us in that sugar bowl," said Nelly Delly.

"So did I," said Mr. Blom. "They were rummaging so thoroughly. But did you hear them ringing up Doctor Vink?"

"Yes," said Johannes. "But what's the good? In a minute the doctor will be here and we can't go with him because we haven't found Wiplala yet."

"No," sighed Nelly Delly. "And I am afraid he may not be in the room any longer. I am so afraid that he won't be

in the house at all, that he slipped through a mouse hole and went home to his own country, the Land of the Wiplalas. I think that he was fed up with us and that we won't ever see him again."

"In that case we will have to remain as small as this for the rest of our lives," said Mr. Blom. "And we could never go back to our own house."

"Oh Wiplala, Wiplala, where are you now?"

"Here," said a soft little voice.

As if they had been stung by a wasp, they jumped up and peered through the ferns and leaves. And look, there sat Wiplala, hidden in a flower, smiling rather shyly.

"Hullo," he said. "I have been sitting here for ages. I did not dare go down."

"Wiplala," shouted Johannes much too loudly.

"Ssst, be careful!" whispered Nelly Delly. "They can hear you down in the room."

They all peered down through the plants. The two ladies were still sitting at the table with Klaasje. They just sat and kept watch, but apparently they had not heard a thing.

Then Mr. Blom began to talk to Wiplala rather severely. "Look here, my young friend," he said. "You have caused us an awful lot of trouble. Do you realize that? We could have got away from here long ago, the doctor came to fetch us. We all crept into his bag and then we noticed you weren't there. Where were you then?"

"I was under the walnut cupboard just like you," said Wiplala.

"Quite. But when we all ran through the room to get into

the bag, why didn't you come with us? Tell me why!"

"I saw something," said Wiplala.

"You saw something? What did you see? Something that frightened you? Didn't you dare?"

"I suddenly saw something in the room, something I wanted," stammered Wiplala. "Something I simply had to have. And so I stayed under the cupboard till they went to bed and then . . . I climbed up here."

"Listen," said Mr. Blom. "In a minute the doctor will come again. Of course, he will undo his bag again and we must crawl into it. Then you won't leave us in the lurch again? You will come with us?"

"Yes," said Wiplala. "Then I'll come with you."

"You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Oh dear," said Wiplala and Nelly Delly. "If only the doctor would come soon."

16

Berries

“Please sit down, Doctor,” said Miss Louise. “Klaasje, quickly make us some coffee. We are very glad you have come. We have had a dreadful night.”

“A dreadful night!” said Miss Adele. “We haven’t slept a wink. Klaasje, give the doctor some honey cake. Of course, you haven’t had your breakfast yet, Doctor? It is only four o’clock.”

“Yes,” said Doctor Vink. “An odd hour to pay a call. But here I am. Please tell me exactly what has happened.”

He sat down in a green plush chair, stretched out his legs, put his case by his side and left the outside pocket wide open. In the meantime he let his eyes roam through the room and thought: Where can they be? Under that antique cupboard again? Or would they have hidden somewhere

else? After a while I shall start talking about the chandelier again or about something else that is up high. If everybody looks up, then our small friends will have a good chance of diving into the bag.

"Thank you very much," he said when the coffee and the cake stood in front of him. "Now, please tell me what is the matter?"

"Oh, Doctor," said Miss Louise, trembling. "You may say that we are not quite right in the head . . . but this house is spooky."

"Have you seen anything?" said the doctor gravely.

"Yes . . . or no," said Miss Adele. "We shall tell you exactly. In the middle of the night, at about three o'clock, we both happened to be awake, for we don't sleep very well . . . in the middle of the night we heard a noise in the drawing-room."

"Mice, perhaps?" said the doctor.

"If only it had been mice, Doctor. But no, we heard the typewriter."

"The typewriter? Here in this room?"

"Yes, and also the piano. We clearly heard someone play the piano. We even recognized the tune. At first we just lay in bed, stiff with fright, as you will understand."

"Of course," said the doctor.

"And then we thought, we *must* know what it is. So we came in here, and Klaasje got out of bed too. She had heard it too, isn't that so, Klaasje?"

"Yes, Miss," said Klaasje.

"Well, and then we switched on the light and looked!"

"That was very brave of you," said the doctor. "It might have been burglars."

"Yes," said Miss Adele. "It might have been burglars. But they weren't, at least not ordinary ones."

"No, not ordinary ones," said Miss Louise mysteriously. "Because I saw on top of the typewriter a tiny little man. That small!"

"A little man? You mean a goblin?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, and when the light went on, he ran away. I only saw him for a second, just for a moment, but very clearly."

"And then?" asked the doctor.

"Then? Nothing else. But isn't that enough? In the typewriter was a sheet of paper and there was some typing on it. Look for yourself. 'Wiplalawhereareyou.' You see! The little man had typed that."

"And after that?" said the doctor calmly.

"Then we examined everything, turned everything upside down, looked everywhere, but we found nothing. Not a thing. We didn't dare go to bed again and all night long we have sat here in these chairs waiting to see if this spooky business would start all over again."

"And did the spooky business start again?" asked the doctor.

"No," said Miss Adele. "Nothing happened."

"Tell me," said the doctor. "What did you eat last night?"

"Eat, Doctor? What did we eat, Louise?"

"Fried liver and onions," said Miss Louise.

"Aha," said the doctor.

"But what has that got to do with it?"

"That has got everything to do with it," said the doctor. "It's like this—thank you for the honey cake, it was delicious—it's like this: fried liver and onions can sometimes cause . . . gibelitis."

"Gibelitis?" asked Miss Louise, very frightened. "What is that, Doctor? Is that something serious? Can that make you very ill?"

"Not really," said Doctor Vink. "It is not as serious as all that, but gibelitis has caused people to see and hear all sorts of things in the night, things that aren't there, if you see what I mean. That is gibelitis. Hm, yes."

"Oh, Doctor," said Miss Adele. "Do you really think we suffer from that? But that typing and the piano—we heard it, the three of us."

"Certainly," said Doctor Vink. "But then you all had fried liver and onions, didn't you?"

"Yes, that's true," said Miss Louise. "But that little man. I did really see him with my own eyes."

"Quite," said the doctor. "That is a typical symptom of gibelitis. All the people who suffer from gibelitis see little men. That happens frequently, far more often than you think. Oh, I have lots of patients who see little men in the night, or other strange things, and *always* after eating fried liver and onions. So I would advise you not to eat that again, especially for supper. And I will give you all a powder. That will calm you down, so that you will sleep comfortably and then you will find that the gibelitis is cured, and you will never again see or hear strange things in this house." The

doctor spoke so pleasantly and soothingly, that the ladies calmed down completely. They were now convinced that nearly everything that had happened, had not *really* happened.

But in the meantime there they sat on the top of the bookcase, Mr. Blom, Johannes, Nelly Delly and Wiplala, surrounded by the greenery and the flowers of the big bowl.

"Look," whispered Mr. Blom. "The doctor's bag is wide open. We could easily slip into it. But how can we get down without being noticed. How can we reach it?"

"If only we could give the doctor a sign," said Nelly Delly. "Let's slide down the ivy," said Johannes. "Then at least we will be on the floor."

"Yes, let's do that," whispered Mr. Blom, but at that moment Wiplala held his little hand open in front of their noses and said: "First, take a berry. They are nice and they will make you feel strong."

They all looked a bit doubtfully at the red berries in Wiplala's hand.

"What are they?" asked Mr. Blom, but he took one because they looked so appetizing and they had not eaten anything for a long time. All three put a berry into their mouths. They began to chew: the berries tasted sweet and fragrant, and then something odd happened! They began to feel a bit sick and dizzy . . . they clutched at ferns and flower stems, it was as if the whole room began to turn round, they saw everything in the room get smaller and smaller, while they themselves grew and grew and grew and became very big! Good heavens! How big! And all this

happened in complete silence—an uncanny silence, the only sound being the slight noise of breaking stems and leaves.

It had happened so noiselessly that nobody down in the room had noticed anything.

“Now, you take this powder,” said Doctor Vink cordially. “And when you have swallowed it you will never see anything odd in this room again, I promise. Never again.”

The two ladies each took a powder with their coffee and said: “Thank you very much, Doctor. We shall give Klaasje her powder later in the kitchen.”

And now, thought Doctor Vink, I shall have to talk about that chandelier again, or something else that is high up in the room. If we are all looking up, then those poor little things can creep into my bag.

“What an exceptionally fine bookcase you have got,” he began, and his eyes moved along the bookcase and then up it—he stared . . . and stared!

Miss Louise and Miss Adele followed his gaze. They looked up at the top of the bookcase.

There, right on the top, sat a gentleman with a moustache. And next to him sat two children, a boy and a girl. They were sitting right on a bowl of plants, surrounded by battered stems and flowers.

The eyes of the two ladies grew bigger and bigger. Their jaws dropped, they uttered a low cry and both fainted simultaneously.

The doctor got up, stepped across them, and went to the bookcase. He stretched out his hand and said: “You can jump down, Mr. Blom, and now the two of you.”

In turn they took his hand and jumped on to the floor, still speechless with confusion after these strange happenings.

"Is little Wiplala there too?" asked Doctor Vink.

"Yes," cried Wiplala. His head stuck out of Mr. Blom's pocket.

"Good," said the doctor. "Now you go outside as fast as you can, go straight home from here. I shall iron things out with the ladies. Quick!"

He pushed them through the door, they walked down the hall and a minute later they stood outside, on the canal.

In the basement, Klaasje's face stared after them in amazement.

17 *Commemoration*

"Let's sit down on the railing of that little bridge," said Mr. Blom. "I must have a good look round."

They sat side by side on the bridge and looked around.

"Dear me," sighed Mr. Blom. "How happy I am. We are big again. We are human beings, no longer gnomes."

"And we can go home again as usual," cried Nelly Delly.

"And to school," cried Johannes. "I shall quite like going to school again."

"And to the swimming pool, and we can have games in the street again, and we need never again be scared of people and never again crawl away."

"Wiplala," said Nelly Delly, and she took the little fellow out of her father's pocket. She held him close in both her hands and said: "Wiplala, how did it all happen?"



"Yes, that's what I would like to know," said Mr. Blom. "How did it happen, Wiplala?"

"Well," said Wiplala. "You remember how we sat underneath that walnut cupboard? And the doctor put down his bag, wide open, and the three of you crept into it—you remember?"

"Of course we do, and it was so odd that you did not go with us. You saw something, you told us later. You had seen something, but what was it that you saw?"

"I wanted to go with you," said Wiplala, "and I crawled from under the cupboard. Then I looked up and saw a bowl of plants on the bookcase. One of those plants I recognized and I knew immediately that *that* was the plant I needed. That was the plant with the berries, and I needed those berries to pixilate you back to big human beings again."

"But why didn't you say so, Wiplala?"

"There was no time to say anything, it all went so quickly. In a moment you were all in the bag and I had the choice between two things: I could either go with you, but then we would leave the house and might never come back again. Or I could stay and pick those berries. Well, I only thought for a second and then I chose the latter. I stayed behind."

"That was very sensible of you," said Mr. Blom, full of admiration.

"Oh, Wiplala," said Johannes. "We think you are so clever. We think you can pixilate beautifully!"

"You'd better put me back in your pocket," said Wiplala. "People might see me and then there would be more trouble."

"Come on, let's go home," said Mr. Blom, and he went ahead. The others followed. They walked through all the well-known streets and they were so happy that every now and again they danced or skipped or took enormous strides or did a long jump. It was grand, grand to be able to walk in the streets just like that. Wonderful to be big again!

"Hi," said Mr. Blom. "Look at that, there is a crowd of people standing in the square in front of our house."

"What's up? Is that meant for us?" asked Nelly Delly anxiously. "They haven't come to attack our house?"

"We had better go back," said Johannes pathetically. "I am a bit frightened of people now."

"Come on," said Mr. Blom. "There is no need for that now. They can't pick us up and put us in their pockets any longer. No, wait! They haven't come for us. They are standing round the statue."

The statue of Arthur Hollidee, the poet, still stood in the middle of the square. He was still a statue, a poet of stone. And there he stood with his one hand stretched out, the other holding the empty plate.

The little square was crowded with people: the Bloms stood in the midst of it, it was an awful crush.

"What is happening here?" whispered Mr. Blom to the man who stood next to him.

"Fifty years ago the poet, Arthur Hollidee, was born," said the man. "The great poet, Hollidee. And so now there is a Commemoration."

"I see," said Mr. Blom. "A Commemoration. That is

nice. And who is that gentleman there who is going to make a speech?"

"That is the Minister of Education," whispered the man next to him. "Ssssst . . . he is just beginning."

Nelly Delly and Johannes climbed on some steps in order to see and hear everything better. They saw the Minister, standing in front of the statue, they saw all those men and women and children crowding the square and they also saw Emilia Hollidee, the sister of the poet. She stood next to the Minister and held her handkerchief over her eyes. For her it was, of course, a sad day, even if it was wonderful to know that her brother had become so famous since he was turned to stone.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the Minister. He wore a black suit and looked very fine and very solemn. "Ladies and gentlemen, fifty years ago a child was born in this town, whose work the entire world would later talk about! The great poet Hollidee was born in this town, lived and worked in this town. You all knew him, you have read his works!"

When the Minister had reached this point, Mr. Blom felt something wriggling violently in his pocket. He bent sideways and hissed at Wiplala: "What is the matter? What are you doing?"

"I can do it now," Wiplala hissed back.

"No," said Mr. Blom. "Please, Wiplala. This is such an awkward moment, just wait till. . . ." But it was no good Mr. Blom saying anything. Wiplala swiftly moved his little hands.

The Minister continued his speech: "Arthur Hollidee is no more," he said. "And yet he lives in our hearts."

At that moment people became rather restless. For the statue moved! The statue slowly lifted its arms and stretched itself! The statue moved its eyelids, it yawned!

"He is alive!" cried the people. "He is alive!"

"Quite," said the Minister, a bit flustered by all the noise and commotion. "That is what I said just now: he lives in our hearts, in our memory." The statue had finished yawning and looked around in amazement. He also looked with astonishment at the plate in his right hand and then carefully put it down on the ground.

Emilia Hollidee turned round, saw her brother and cried: "Arthur!" Now the Minister also turned round and saw the statue, the living statue.

"What's that?" he cried indignantly. "You move! You are alive!"

"Yes," said Arthur Hollidee sheepishly. "Anything wrong with that?"

"Certainly," said the Minister petulantly. "You have no right to move, you are made of stone! You are a statue! How can we commemorate you when you're just standing there, alive?"

"I don't know about that," said Arthur Hollidee. "But *must* you commemorate me?"

And then all the people in the square began to cheer. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live our poet, Arthur Hollidee!" they shouted. "Long live our famous poet! Commemorating a living poet, that's the right idea! Hurrah!"

"What are they commemorating?" Arthur Hollidee asked a lady who stood near him.

"You were born fifty years ago," said the lady.

"Born fifty years ago? Oh, well then it is just my birthday," cried Arthur Hollidee. "Then I am fifty today. It's my birthday."

"Many happy returns of the day!" shouted the people. "Warm congratulations!" And all the flowers they intended to put at the foot of the statue they now put into the hands of the living poet. There he stood, with his arms full of white and pink carnations and tulips and lilac. He looked baffled and did not appear to grasp what was happening to him at all. Then he looked at all those people rather helplessly and said: "I'm hungry."

"Arthur, my dearest brother," cried Emilia, and she threw herself into his arms. "For two months you have been made of stone. And now you are warm and alive. And we are no longer poor, Arthur. You are now very famous and your poems are sold in all the shops. So we have money to buy pork chops. Just look around you, look how the people are waving and smiling. Listen to them cheering!"

"May I congratulate you?" said the Minister stiffly. He shook hands with Arthur but he looked cross. He was disgusted with the whole business. He wasn't used to making speeches in front of statues that suddenly turned out to be alive.

The people in the square lifted Arthur Hollidee on their shoulders and carried him around. Emilia walked next to him and wept with joy in a clean handkerchief. "He is alive



again!" she cried to Mr. Blom, and Mr. Blom shook her hand and said: "I told you, Emilia, that everything would be all right again!"

"Yes, indeed!" she said. "You predicted it all! You are coming back with us? Look, there is a whole brass band, they want to carry Arthur through the whole town!"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Blom. "I think we would rather come and see you when there is not such a crowd. Come on," he said to his children. "We are going to our own house. We want to see how things are there."

And they pushed through the crowd to reach their house.

"Perhaps they have carted everything away," said Nelly Delly. "All those friends of Mr. Dingemans, who forced their way in."

But it wasn't too bad. Everything was still there and most things were in their proper place again.

"Home again . . . we are back home," said Johannes. "How wonderful! How absolutely wonderful! Oh, and there is pussy!" Fly came to meet them, purring. She wound herself round their legs and miaowed. "Darling, darling pussy Fly! How good it is to be home again!"

18

Home Again

Nelly Delly and Johannes walked through the room, the passage, the whole house and kept on recognizing different things.

"Look, there is my boat," said Johannes. "I shall sail it in the bath tonight. And there is my train. Do you remember how we drove round and round in it when we were little?"

"Yes, and how we went swimming in the bath," laughed Nelly Delly. "And how we cooked our dinner on the dolls' stove. Oh my, that was fun!"

"What do you say?" cried Mr. Blom. "Fun? Fun to be such midgets. You ungrateful wretches! Don't you remember all the worry and misery we had?"

"Of course I remember all that," said Nelly Delly. "I wouldn't like to go back to it, only some things *were* fun!"



"How do *you* really like it being so small?" she asked Wiplala.

"I have always been as small as this," said Wiplala. He was busy driving round in a toy car, and he looked blissfully happy, for he found Johannes' toys magnificent.

Pussy Fly had run after them, through the entire house, and now went to Wiplala. The little fellow got out of his car and climbed on to Fly's soft back. She gave him a ride through the room.

Nelly Delly looked at him so tenderly and said: "I am so glad you are with us, Wiplala. You helped us a lot during those weeks. Some time you ought to go to school with me. I shall tuck you away safely in my satchel and I won't show you to anybody. Then you could see my school."

"Oh look," said Johannes. "The clock is damaged. The

nice old grandfather clock in the hall. The little angel has broken off—oh dear, the angel has come off. Oh, here it is.”

Nelly Delly came to have a look and picked up the angel. It had come off the clock, probably because the intruders had bumped up against it.

Nelly Delly held the little angel in her hand, it was naked and pink and it had golden wings. “We must stick it on presently,” she said. “But first I want to make some coffee. I just got some chocolate doughnuts at the baker’s, so we are going to have a nice, jolly little party.”

As she was making the coffee, Mr. Blom said: “There are several things I must do. First of all, I must ring up Doctor Vink, to thank him. And then I still have to pay those forty-five guilders to that restaurant.”

“Are you really going to pay that, Daddy?” asked Nelly Delly, astonished.

“Of course, what do you think? I hate debts. Then I also want to go to the grocer shop where we ate that honey cake and nibbled all sorts of nice things. There I also want to pay damages.”

“And we must ring up Lotty,” cried Johannes.

“I’d better do some telephoning,” said Mr. Blom. He lifted the receiver and rang Doctor Vink. While he was talking he heard the flutter and beating of wings above his head, but he was too busy telephoning to take much notice. “It is as though there were a bird in the room,” said Johannes. “I hear little wings beating.” He looked round and called out: “Nelly Delly, look!”

Nelly Delly looked and stood stock still with amazement.

There was the little pink angel with the golden wings flying through the room. It was gliding so gracefully in the air on those little wings: it made all kinds of unexpected movements. It flew quite close over Mr. Blom's head and gave a hard tug at his hair.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Blom, who had just finished his telephone conversation. He looked up and his mouth fell open.

"There we are again," he cried. "No sooner have we started an ordinary normal life at home than that Wiplala of ours is up to his tricks once more! Well I never! The angel from the clock. Wiplala, what do we want with a live angel in our house?"

Wiplala looked up with a smile, his little face beaming with pride.

"Now I can do it quite well, can't I?" he asked. "I am learning gradually, aren't I? Now I can pixilate much better than when I came here, isn't that so?" And he danced up and down.

"You do it far too well," shouted Mr. Blom. "Just look what that creature is up to!"

It turned out to be a very naughty angel. It flew to the open food cupboard and flung down four cups, one after the other, and all the butter. It nipped past the bookcase and pulled out a book which fell down smack on the electric kettle. A big wallop of hot water gushed over the tea table. Johannes and Nelly Delly shrieked and laughed and jumped through the room to catch the naughty little angel, but that was no good, it was too quick. Far too quick!

The door opened and there stood Mrs. Dingemans. She was dumbfounded. "Have you come back?" she asked. "Back in your own home! How nice!" She stretched out her hand, but there came the little angel. It flew towards her and sat down on the palm of her outstretched hand.

Mrs. Dingemans breathed deeply, yelled and dropped her hand; the little angel teasingly fluttered round her head.

"I can see it's still a madhouse here," cried Mrs. Dingemans, cross and frightened. "I'll come back when things are normal again but not as long as the place is bewitched." And she quickly disappeared through the door.

"Now you see," said Mr. Blom dejectedly. "Our home help has run away, we have got to do everything ourselves, and all because that naughty Wiplala likes pixilation. Catch that angel, children!"

The hunt for the angel began again. The little creature loved teasing them. In its flight it messed up Mr. Blom's papers and pulled down a flower pot. Then it sat for a moment on the table with its feet in the whipped cream of a bun. It made Fly, the cat, really nervous.

"Nów then," whispered Johannes, and he sneaked towards the table, his handkerchief in his hand to grab the angel with it.

But just as he reached it, up the angel flew, looped a beautiful loop and floated out through the open window at the back of the house.

"Oh catch it," cried Nelly Delly. "Do catch it, otherwise it will fly away."

They ran outside into the garden, to fetch the angel back.



They saw it alighting on a tree, on one of the lower branches and they ran towards the tree. But just when they stretched out their hands to grab it, the little angel rose, stretched its golden wings and flew almost vertically up into the air.

In the garden Nelly Delly, Johannes and Mr. Blom stood and watched the little angel. Its golden wings shone in the sunlight, it went higher and higher, and became a tiny little dot, first a golden dot and then a dark dot . . . gone! They could see it no more. The little angel had flown away.

"Poor little angel," said Nelly Delly. "Where will it land?"

"Perhaps it will reach a nice little heaven somewhere," said Johannes confidently. "A little wooden heaven with little golden doors."

That consoled them a bit.

"What are you looking at? A jet plane?"

They turned and saw Doctor Vink standing in the garden. He had come through the back gate, and next to him stood Lotty.

"Lotty!" cried Nelly Delly. It was a most exciting meeting. The children embraced and all talked at the same time and asked a hundred questions.

"How well you look, Lotty! You look fit and plump! "

"And how big you are!" cried Lotty. For of course the last time they had seen each other Nelly Delly was no bigger than Lotty's middle finger.

In the meantime Mr. Blom was talking to Doctor Vink.

"And what happened to those ladies, Miss Louise and

Miss Adele, Doctor?" asked Mr. Blom, and he looked a little embarrassed, for he found it a painful memory.

"Well," said Doctor Vink, and he too looked a little embarrassed, for he realized that he had made a bit of a fool of those ladies.

"You remember they fainted? Well, when they came to I told them that the fried liver and onions were the cause of it all. And I promised them that I would come again."

"Poor Miss Louise and Miss Adele," said Nelly Delly. "They will never risk eating liver and onions again. But now will you all come into the sitting-room? I have made the coffee and we have lots of cakes."

"I say, where is Wiplala?" asked Lotty.

"Inside," said Johannes. "He is driving round in one of my cars. Something odd happened just now, he pixilated again. Wiplala, where are you?"

They went into the house and called: "Wiplala!"

"He is not in the sitting-room," said Nelly Delly. "Wiplala!"

"I'll look upstairs," said Johannes. They searched the whole house. They became worried and anxious. He was nowhere to be found. Lotty and Doctor Vink helped in the search, and Mr. Blom, who had always grumbled most about Wiplala's pranks, now looked in every hole and corner to find him.

"He must have hidden himself as a joke," said Nelly Delly. "He has done that before. He is so small, he can hide in the oddest pots and pans."

"Would he be in the cake tin?"

"Don't look for him any more," said Mr. Blom. "There is no need to. See what I found!" He took a sheet of paper from the typewriter and showed it to them.

It was a short typed letter. It said:

*I can\$% " xxxnow pixilate
I goback (!£ hye*

"Did Wiplala write that? Is that a letter from Wiplala? Oh," cried Nelly Delly. "He has gone back to the other wiplalas! Oh, how horrid! He's gone!"

"Through the mouse hole in the cupboard," shouted Johannes. "Perhaps we can call him back!" They opened the cupboard. Still near the lower shelf was the little hole that Wiplala had come through the first time. They stuck their fingers in it and called: "Wiplala! Wiplala!"

But there was not a sound. Wiplala had gone away.

Nelly Delly sat down on a chair, put her hands over her face and began to cry.

Johannes did not cry, but he bit his lips and looked terribly unhappy.

"Now just listen," said Mr. Blom, and put one arm round Nelly Delly, the other round Johannes. "Listen to your stupid old father: Wiplala has gone away to his own country, to his own friends, and I am very glad for his sake."

"Glad?" sobbed Nelly Delly.

"Yes, I am sure he will be much happier there than here. He can now pixilate very well, they won't send him away again. And just imagine what it would be like if he had stayed here. We would always have to hide him from visitors. We

would have to get him out of the way, so that nobody should see him, and if we went out with him, we would have to take him in a handbag. That would be awful for him. You know now from experience how awful it is when you always have to hide from inquisitive people. When you are afraid someone will catch you, that is terrible!"

"But . . . we shall miss him awfully," said Nelly Delly. "I was so dreadfully fond of him, weren't you, Johannes?"

"I was, dreadfully," nodded Johannes.



"Perhaps he will come back some time," said Lotty who had looked and listened quietly all that time. "Perhaps he will come again just to say hello. And then your father is right—he will be much happier in his own country with lots of little wiplalas around him."

"Let's have some coffee now," said Mr. Blom. "In any case, it is lovely to have Lotty here. And to have Doctor Vink."

Nelly Delly and Johannes were comforted a little. And the next day they went to school again and life became quite normal. So ordinary, so normal, that Nelly Delly sometime asked herself: Was it really true? Was there really ever little Wiplala in our house?

But one morning, a week later, she found the spider in the Virginia creeper. The stone spider.

"Oh dear, we forgot to pixilate him back," said Nelly Delly. "It's too late now." And she cried bitterly for a moment. Then she took the spider with her and put him on top of her own little cupboard.